

ROMANCING MODERNITY: POETRY, PROCESS, AND POSTSECULARISM

by

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Abstract

This study reads key British Romantic texts (*The Prelude*, *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, *The Book of Thel*, *Jerusalem*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, *The Triumph of Life*, and *Frankenstein*) through the lens of integral philosophy, radical aesthetics, and speculative feminism. Its primary theoretical context is a postsecular shift in recent speculative realist thought, which is making the etho-ecological metaphysics of romantic poetry newly legible. As the term speculative realism remains ill-defined, in this context it should be understood in the “organic realist” tradition of aesthetic ontologists such as Massumi and Stengers, inspired by Whitehead and Deleuze, rather than the tradition of object-oriented ontologists such as Harman and Morton, inspired by Heidegger. A key claim of this study is that these versions of speculative realism constitute two different kinds of materialism, one of which might be called critical materialism (optics) and the other speculative materialism (haptics). The critical materialist approach, it is suggested, has dominated the affective turn in romantic studies, in ways that perpetuate skepticism about the more-than-human etho-ecological mode of attention presented in romantic poetry. To clarify the confused model of affect that results from the conflation of these materialisms, this study attempts to flesh out the difference that speculative materialist and critical materialist perspectives make to the interpretation of romantic poems. It finds that the latter perpetuates a modern private optics and centered metaphysics while the former ventures toward a postsecular haptics or etho-ecological metaphysics.

This study has been entitled *Romancing Modernity: Poetry, Process, and Postsecularism*, to engage the widest possible audience. The title foregrounds the argument that the British Romantics challenged the modern bar on etho-ecological attention, advancing an alternative modernity that

speculative feminists and ecosophical thinkers are now restoring to view. An alternative title, which would draw attention to its more specific argument about romantic poetry, is “*Earth’s Answer*”: *Etho-ecological Modernity and Haptic Aesthetics in Blake, Wordsworth, and the Second-Generation Romantics*.

Lay Summary

This study contributes a new model for understanding British Romantic poetry, circa 1790 to 1822. The etho-ecological model I propose is grounded in the process philosophy and speculative metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. In essence, Whitehead argues that modern thought, since the Enlightenment, has repudiated metaphysics, tacitly assuming the representational and exceptional nature of human consciousness. This "modern doctrine," he points out, presents itself as concrete and materialist, but is actually abstract, entailing a "camouflaged" and "dogmatic" metaphysics. In effect, modernity has privileged "optics" (representation) over "haptics" (touch, relation) in ways that isolate the centered subject. I argue that current critical modalities in romantic studies, even after the embodied turn, continue to miss the etho-ecological metaphysics expressed in romantic poetry. Reading key texts (by Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley), I call to notice the insistent strategies by which romantic poetry challenges the modern bar on etho-ecological attention.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, William Ian Rubel.

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For my wife, Tenzin Youdon, who has given me turquoise.

“I answered: ‘All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics...’”

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

A couple of typos:

p. 36 (epigraph): should read "Matter not lightly to be heard"

p. 128: "to see the fly"

There were a couple around pp. 58-65, but I forgot to note them. In general, I am impressed by how clean the text is.

Latest typos:

p. 237: fn. 191: "Wordsworth" misspelled

p. 247: should read "Moneta's stairs."

Glad to be getting into some Shelley, now, too.

BTW, a typo: "prophecies" should be the verb "prophesies."

Overture

"To omit a word always, to resort to inept metaphors and obvious periphrases, is perhaps the most emphatic way of stressing it." Borges¹

"Modern scholarship and modern science... canalize thought and observation within predetermined limits, based upon inadequate metaphysical assumptions dogmatically assumed." Whitehead²

i. The "Heart" of Poetic Attention

Imagine Wordsworth in his early twenties, not long graduated from Cambridge and perhaps recently returned from a heady and confusing time in France, trekking "Through Wales on foot." One warm, misty summer night, guided by a shepherd and a dog, he and his hiking friend, Robert Jones, set out to see "the sun / Rise from the top of Snowdon" (P.13.4-5). The young poet is young, headstrong, and expectant: "... With forehead bent / Earthward, as if in opposition set / Against an Enemy, I panted up / With eager pace, and no less eager thoughts" (13.29-32). So eager is his pace

¹ "The Garden of Forking Paths," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, 44-54 (53).

² Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 118.

that, as the “foremost of the Band” (13.35), he emerges into the moonlight, to discover the mist unexpectedly and marvelously below his feet: “...instantly a Light upon the turf / Fell like a flash: I looked about, and lo! / The Moon stood naked in the Heavens, at height / Immense above my head, and on the shore / I found myself of a huge sea of mist, / Which, meek and silent, rested at my feet” (13.39-44).

With this remarkable image, drawn from lived experience, Wordsworth launches into one of the most synesthetic passages in nature poetry. Its peculiar focal point is a blue breach in that floating sea of mist, through which he hears “streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice.”³ This “dark deep thoroughfare” becomes, in the poet’s mind that night, an emblem of “The Soul, the Imagination of the whole” (13.65):

...and we stood, the mist
Touching our very feet; and from the other shore
At distance not the third part of a mile
Was a blue chasm; a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.
The universal spectacle throughout
Was shaped for admiration and delight,
Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged
The Soul, the Imagination of the whole. (53 - 65)

³ A study might be made of the recurrence in romantic poetry of this auditory metaphor of “multeity-in-unity” (Coleridge) or “interfusion” (Wordsworth). Arguably, this image of many waters singing with one voice is an organic figure for the manifold (un)weaving of poesis. One finds it in Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*: “And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething, / As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing, / A mighty fountain momentarily was forced... / And ’mid this tumult Kubla heard from far / Ancestral voices prophesying war!” One also finds it in Keats’s *Hyperion*: “Throughout all the isle / There was no covert, no retired cave / Unhaunted by the murmorous noise of waves, / Though scarcely heard in many a green recess.” As I will discuss, one also finds a version of this image in the prophetic blast from the shell in the dream of the Arab in Book 5 of *The Prelude*, and in the image of the deeply hidden yet intensely active “shape all light” at the heart of Shelley’s *The Triumph of Life*.

But what does Wordsworth mean by “the whole”? The clue comes a few lines later, when he likens that “breach / Through which the homeless voice of waters rose” to “the perfect image of a mighty Mind, / Of one that feeds upon infinity” (69-70). By the whole, Wordsworth does not gesture toward some autonomous and circumscriptive totality. Rather, he refers to a kind of metaphysics that modernity has banned, in which no event or occasion stands on its own or exists independently but is shot through with the infinite. Here, the infinite is not an abstract concept, but refers to the interrelations that interfuse apparently private or solitary persons, places, and things. Another name for this metaphysics might be integral (or porous) ecology.

At heart, what Wordsworth seems to praise in these lines, and the roughly sixty lines that follow, is the compositional dynamism and affective intensivity of nature.⁴ The sound of the waters rising through the blue breach in the sea of mist becomes, for him, a revelation of the universal⁵ forms that underpin the mind – a momentary glimpse into the infinite interfusive currents or commingling streams that flow together as the substrate of experience:

A meditation rose in me that night
Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene
Had passed away, and it appeared to me
The perfect image of a mighty Mind,
Of one that feeds upon infinity,
That is exalted by an underpresence,
The sense of God, or whatso'er is dim
Or vast in its own being... (13.66-73)

Many things conspired, one might say, to produce a sense of inspired insight in the young poet that night: the time of day, the quality of the moonlight on the mist, the sound of the waters, the transient atmospheric accidents, the poet's impressionable age and mood, the oxygenated state of

⁴ Here, nature should be interpreted not simply as the world of external and non-verbal facts, but more radically as the aesthetic and ontological ground of experience.

⁵ In the sense of shared, more-than-personal, interrelational .

his blood, the clarity that comes with the pleasant exhaustion of his body, and so on. In one glimpse, he prehended an aesthetic intensivity that underpins both nature and mind, by which the “actual” feeds upon the “virtual” or “presentational immediacy” feeds on “causal efficacy,”⁶ the “one” that “feeds upon infinity.”

Somewhere between 1791 and 1805, and until his death in 1850, he wrote and revised that (in)famous peak experience and culminating passage of *The Prelude*, his posthumously published epic of the “Growth of a Poet’s Mind.” One might hail the Snowdon passage as one of the heights of nature poetry, yet one might also remember that the passage quickly moves from that embodied moment on the mountain to a reflection on poets, whose minds are “fit / To hold communion with the invisible world”:

Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss
That can be known is theirs, the consciousness
Of whom they are, habitually infused
Through every image, and through every thought,
And all impressions... (13.105-11)

On the grounds of such interjections, succeeding generations have concurred that Wordsworth's ecocentrism is tainted with egocentrism. In 1818, in a lively letter to his friend Richard Woodhouse, a twenty-two-year-old John Keats (twenty-five years before Wordsworth became an arid poet laureate, in 1843) diagnosed the older poet’s tendency toward the "egotistical sublime." In the twenty first century, we are certainly as allergic as Keats to such grandiloquence or "painful eloquence" (Morton).

For the lonely soul, nothing could be more alluring than the exhilarating sense of momentary expansion beyond the “dull round” (Blake) of isolation and limitation. What could be more flattering to a young poet’s conceptions than the notion that the compositional power of

⁶ To borrow terms from Bergson and Whitehead. (See endnote xxv).

nature (by which she “moulds... endues... abstracts... combines” elements to “[thrust] upon the senses” a vivid and definite experience) “is the express / Resemblance, in the fulness of its strength / Made visible, a genuine Counterpart / And Brother of the glorious faculty / Which higher minds bear with them as their own” (13.86-90)?

What better subject on which to bluster in high verse than a sublime glimpse into the nature of mind itself? Perhaps in (possibly too) late modernity, we have adopted something more of a Zen attitude about those momentary breaches in our imprisoning ignorance, about which we might ordinarily wish to crow to the world. Perhaps we recognize the irony that in crowing we firmly reestablish the prison, with slightly better decorations. Yet even the Zen patriarchs communicated their moments of satori – moments without dualism – in verse and prose. John Rudy has in fact written a very thorough book comparing Wordsworth's writing to Zen writing.

Oddly enough, recent generations seem to trust Blake more than Wordsworth, in spite of Blake’s baroque and idiosyncratic symbolic vision, which speaks of Zoas, Spectres, Satanic Voids, and Hermaphroditic Rocks:

Such is the Ancient World of Urizen in the Satanic Void
Created from the Valley of Middlesex by Londons River
From Stone-henge and from London Stone, from Cornwall to Cathnes
The Four Zoa's rush around on all sides in dire ruin
Furious in pride of Selfhood the terrible Spectres of Albion
Rear their dark Rocks among the Stars of God: stupendous
Works! A World of Generation continually Creating; out of
The Hermaphroditic Satanic World of rocky destiny
And formed into Four precious stones. (J.3.44-51)

I will leave it to the reader to reach their own conclusions about who was more ecocentric and who more egocentric, Blake or Wordsworth. My humble goal is to show that both poets were less seekers of the mystic and the higher than “haptic” artists, grounded in the immanent tenderness of matter, and thoroughly committed to the world. If this view recalls M. H. Abrams’s notion of

romanticism's "natural supernaturalism" and Harold Bloom's notion of inner apocalypse, I also hope that it contributes a fresh distinction between optic and haptic aesthetics.

Where optics tends to exempt the observer, and to purify the world of interrelations, haptics is what one might call the "science of feelings" (Wordsworth, Note to *The Thorn*). If optics is of the head, then haptics is of the "heart" or of "feeling intellect" (Wordsworth). Throughout this study, cognates for the haptic will include terms such as "prehension" (Whitehead), intensivity, and "etho-ecology" (Stengers). When the romantics speak of paradise, then, they speak not of another world but of "a simple produce of the common day," when the heart and mind relax into etho-ecological attention – a haptic mode that modern optics precludes and interdicts. Blake, Wordsworth, and the other romantics, as I will explore in detail, were not concerned with mysteries or transcendent states but with the very real and violent psychological consequences of this modern foreclosure.

"Etho-ecology" in this sense trespasses the "phenomenal veil" (PR 142) tacitly imputed by modern thought – a bifurcation of subjectivity and objective reality that, Alfred North Whitehead suggests, "pervades modern philosophy" (142). Whitehead's sustained critique of the "modern doctrine" raises a crucial question. What if the modern assumption that the real or the objective is a mystery, forever outside subjective experience, is less a philosophical requirement than a political one? What if subjectivity is reduced to "private psychology" (Whitehead) in the service of a cold optics that, like Adam Smith, redefines sympathy in narrow terms? What if our tacit modern epistemic assumptions are regimes that bar etho-ecological attention?

Even with eyes open to Wordsworth's participation in a liberal humanism that privileges men of a certain class, ethnicity, and culture, one might also remain open to his more radical proposition: that etho-ecological interrelation, or love, lies at the heart of, and proves a trustworthy

ground for, experience. Wordsworth, whom M. H. Abrams called a love poet rather than a nature poet, approaches love in its “ascetic” and ecological, rather than egoistic, sense. When Wordsworth speaks of paradise, perhaps he is not being “lyrical,” or allowing himself to be carried away by onanistic, “ecomimetic” (Morton) rhythms of feeling. What if his passion is construed instead as an alertness, or extraordinary attentiveness, to the intensity at work in ordinary experience? Might he be objecting, urgently, to our *inattention* to, and betrayal of, that with which we are most intimate?

Wordsworth’s song, I propose, is not simply one of praise for human sensitivity, but a critique of human insensitivity. If the moments are few when we feel “wedded to this goodly universe / In love and holy passion,” Wordsworth implies that this is because we *lack* “discerning intellect” or sensitive attention:⁷

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.
(*The Recluse* 800 – 808)

Happily, I will not seek to explain how poetry (and aesthetic representation more broadly) is possible in the first place. I will, however, explore the reasons why the British Romantic poets insisted on the ontic nature of poetic “power” in its relationship to passionate attention, felt interrelationship, or affective communion. In romantic poetry, to attend to nature is to be composed by interrelations. For this reason, I suggest reconsidering Wordsworth and his contemporaries as

⁷ “For this, for everything, we are out of tune” (*The World Is Too Much with Us*).

exponents of a postsecular, etho-ecological modernity, for which the bracketing terms (human, nature) prove less vital than the bracketed term, sympathy.

Despite Adam Smith's mid-eighteenth century attempts to sanitize the concept of sympathy,⁸ for the romantic poets sympathy intimates more-than-private feeling. This is clear in the final books of *The Prelude*, where Wordsworth grows ever more intoxicated with the notion that both the human mind and nature find their source in an invisible communion. Looking back on the personal crisis he experienced as a young man in his twenties, after returning to England from France in 1792, when his ability to imagine a "new world" was briefly "impair'd" by intellectual and political preconceptions, and then "restored" in poetic attention, he writes (to his imagined reader, Coleridge):

...and I remember well
That in life's every-day appearances
I seemed about this period to have sight
Of a new world, a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted and made visible
To other eyes, as having for its base
That whence our dignity originates,
That which both gives it being and maintains
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without:
That excellence, pure spirit, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.
(Book 12, 368-379)

The "new world," he hints, is present but invisible in this world, and to be a poet is to attune oneself to its invisible or virtual flow, which Whitehead termed "creativity," and which, in this study, I will refer to as etho-ecological intensivity.

I eschew the term "spiritual" in part because the domain of spirituality has been set, traditionally, outside of academic discourse, but also because the romantics tended to do so.

⁸ See Appendix A.

Wordsworth, for instance, was not afraid to say he “dared to tread... holy ground,” but adds that he is “[s]peaking no dream” (*The Prelude*, Book 12, 251- 252). If to speak of the spiritual is to speak of that which lies beyond the material (and, hence, a dream), then he insists that he is in fact speaking of the real or the material. Here, again, terms such as “natural” and “spiritual” tend to tacitly reinforce the dualism of the “subject-predicate dogma” (Whitehead). Throughout this study, my concern will be with offering a haptic alternative to this disembodied or nonrelational optics. Hence, I propose that, peculiar as it may seem, the speculative realist notion of the “etho-ecological” (Stengers) is more useful than terms like spiritual and natural; it gives a clearer picture of the haptic and interrelational quality of the “rapture, tenderness, and hope” (Book 12, 239) that Wordsworth wished to “pour” through “unadulterated ears” (238-9).

ii. Romancing Modernity: beyond the modern doctrine

Throughout this study, I will explore the ramifications of Marjorie Levinson’s proposition, in “A Motion and a Spirit: Romancing Spinoza,” that new trajectories in contemplative science and embodied philosophy ask us to rethink the “metaphysical junk” (Levinson) to which so much of romantic poetry has been relegated *by* romantic scholars. I tie Levinson’s Spinozist rereading of Wordsworth to Whitehead and Deleuze’s efforts to expose the erasure, from modern philosophy, of both aesthetic ontology and speculative metaphysics. For Whitehead, in particular, the “fallacies” of modern thought stem from a move to privilege epistemology over metaphysics.

Modern thought, arguably, has tended to critique metaphysics, and nature poetry, as an involutory whirlpool that promises false riches of nature, essence, relationship, and meaning. From this perspective, metaphysics is intimately tied to a romantic attitude – an “egotistical

sublime,” to remember what Keats wrote about Wordsworth – that elevates aesthetic fantasy and self-involvement over the actual realities of social and political relationship. In other words, from this perspective metaphysics not only betrays the world in favor of something higher than the world, but it also serves the precise political purpose of preserving differences of power – tacitly implying that the reflective few possess more refined sensibilities (more human agency) than the more sensational or animal working class.ⁱ

Again, the great problem with modern optics is that it pretends to dispense with metaphysics, in favor of an empirical and epistemological approach, but in fact presumes the independent optic center (the disembodied and pure observer) as a metaphysical absolute. This excision of metaphysical interrelation is the epistemic violence at work in human exceptionalism, and in “the modern doctrine” (Whitehead) or “modern contract” (Latour). To excise metaphysics is, effectively, to sever the interrelational ties between all forms of life and between supposedly distinct “kinds” of human beings. It falls to religious mystics and ecstatic poets to point out that “Religion & Politics are the Same Thing” because “Brotherhood is Religion” (J.3.10). One can infer that Blake offers “Brotherhood” as a synonym for politics. In one stroke, then, Blake challenges both religion and politics in the optic sense, as divisive forms of competing identifications rather than forms of interrelation.

In the course of this study, I will make little mention of Blake’s Christian faith, if only because Blake’s poetics, like Whitehead’s writings, move in a postsecular direction that poses a challenge to all forms of dogmatic metaphysics, be it scientific materialism or conventional religion. On that grounds, I tend to avoid Blake’s references to Jesus, and to God, but here I break my own rule in order to point out that when Blake does refer to Jesus he seems to refer to a reawakening to compassion or etho-ecological feeling, in excess of “individual perception”:

Jesus replied. I am the resurrection & the Life.
I Die & pass the limits of possibility, as it appears
To individual perception. (J.3.18-20)

His myth of the fall of Albion into materialist or naturalistic perception dramatizes the ways in which modern private psychology isolates each subject in “his own Chaos”: “But Albion fell down, a Rocky fragment from Eternity hurld / By his own Spectre, who is the Reasoning Power in every Man / Into his own Chaos which is the Memory between Man & Man” (J.3.6-8).

Blake shows that to excise metaphysics (“Eternity”) is to narrow experience to isolated human cognition (“Memory”), in ways that tacitly privilege those who situate themselves as most sensible – or most rational in their optics. Epistemological bias institutes inequalities. Urizenically, moderns impose a centered optics that insists on “One command, one joy one desire, / One curse, one weight, one measure / One King, one God, one Law” (*The Book of Urizen*).⁹ Blake shows how modern epistemology *presumes* the abstractions of the pure observer and purely observed.¹⁰

Throughout this study, I read Blake via speculative feminists (Haraway, Braidotti, Stengers) precisely because, more radically than Whitehead or Latour, these thinkers attend to visitational, experiential, more-than-human flows in excess of scientific secularism. Indeed, Donna Haraway has suggested abandoning tame terms like autopoiesis, Anthropocene, and systems and

⁹ “7. Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on
This rock, place with strong hand the Book
Of eternal brass, written in my solitude.
8. Laws of peace, of love, of unity:
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.
Let each chuse one habitation:
His ancient infinite mansion:
One command, one joy one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law.” (*The Book of Urizen*)

¹⁰ In Whitehead’s terms, modern thought, after Locke, privileges “presentational immediacy” over “causal efficacy,” or optics over haptics. Modernity excises *natura naturans* (naturing nature), leaving only *natura naturata* (natured nature). Nature, as a metaphysical flow, becomes unthinkable. This, in turn, implies a bar on modern attention itself.

redeploying, instead, more scandalous terms, such as magic.¹¹ *Natura naturans* may, in this spirit, be a less tepid term than “interrelation.” Not only does “*natura naturans*” encourage us to fabulate, in merry non-cooperation with the scholastic illusion of objective discourse, but it also draws attention to the “unscientific” and dangerous idea that modernity rejects.

But why do moderns find *natura naturans* so dangerous? Why, since the seventeenth century, as Whitehead suggests, has modernity sanitized *natura* of *naturans*: “Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly... However you disguise it, this is the practical outcome of the characteristic scientific philosophy which closed the seventeenth century” (*Science and the Modern World* 69). As I have been suggesting, the simplest and likeliest answer is that etho-ecological sympathy makes it hard to exercise human exceptionalist privilege.ⁱⁱ

I will turn later to Blake’s *There Is No Natural Religion*, which confronts the problem of modern optics¹² most dramatically and humorously, but for now my fumbling point is that modernity imposes real limits on human experience, which operate in our moment-to-moment acts of (in)attention. They function as epistemic regimes, disqualifying experience beyond the “dull round” (Blake). Perhaps one dare not speculate on what the event of experience is like without those policing mechanisms. Yet the world’s ecological and spiritual poetry offers more than just hints and glimpses of that other shore, or of that other world hidden in this world. Too often, confined by scholasticism, we read those haptic expressions as figural and imaginative, in a narrow and literal sense. A case in point might be the poetry of Emily Dickinson, who I touch on only peripherally in this study. In *This World is not conclusion*, for instance, Dickinson writes:

This World is not conclusion.
A Species stands beyond—

¹¹ And “romantic”!

¹² Or what he calls “single vision & Newton’s sleep.” (letter to Thomas Butts, Nov. 22, 1802)

Invisible, as Music—
But positive, as Sound—

I read this as perhaps the most striking of countless references in her poetry to holistic experience of the visitational world as flow and vibration. Wordsworth's poetry, on the whole, expresses the same kind of rapprochement, through "feeling intellect," with a more-than-human universe. Rather than read these as romantic and imaginative expressions of a yearned for sense of relationship or communion, I propose we take them seriously as visceral expressions of the etho-ecological event of experience that modernity debars.

In *Open Secrets*, Anne-Lise Francois has aptly called this haptic mode of writing "the literature of uncounted experience." Francois senses in Wordsworth and Dickinson an invitation to an ethos of care, so light that it does not matter if it is allowed to pass. The etho-ecological event remains noncognitive:¹³

It beckons, and it baffles—
Philosophy, don't know—
And through a Riddle, at the last—
Sagacity, must go—
(*This World is not conclusion*)

Rather than view their lines as "lyrical," taking "inspired" flight from the ordinary, we might ask why modernity tends to miss the etho-ecological event, from moment to moment.

Whitehead, at least, was moved to question the solipsism of modern modes of perception: "[t]he word *perceive* is, in our common usage, shot through and through with the notion of cognitive apprehension" (SMW 86). The crux of Whitehead's etho-ecological thought is its rigorous philosophical effort to return modernity to lived intuition of an interrelational universe. Far from denigrating individual minds, he shows that they matter more than we might think; one's

¹³ One might say that poetry involves counter-cognition, or an "ethos of affirmative reticence and recessive action" (Francois).

intentions and actions are part of the “causal efficacy” and “creativity” of a prehensive universe. He aims to restore our trust that we touch the world and the world touches us. He never rejects the idea that consciousness is synthetic. However, he adds that experience, in the first place, is *not* conscious. The primary mode of experience is metaphysical.¹⁴ This etho-ecological metaphysics, I argue, is the “live current” of British Romantic poetry.

The point of reading the romantics through Whitehead and speculative feminism is to intervene in a disavowal that has been at the heart of decades of suspicious reading of romantic poetry, even after the embodied turns of ecocriticism, green romanticism, and affective theory or new materialism. The disavowal in question is none other than the modern foreclosure of speculative metaphysics, or the modern bar on etho-ecological attention. Modernity has shut its ears to the voice of *natura naturans* that William Blake channels in the opening entry to his *Songs of Experience*, a little poem called “Earth’s Answer,” to which I will turn in due course.

What, then, is etho-ecological metaphysics? It is the interrelational reality of shared sympathies of which modernity is so skeptical. Or, in Whitehead’s sense, it is the return of a shared objective world that modernity has ejected from subjectivity. This is borne out by his commentary that “for Kant, apart from concepts there is nothing to know” (PR 156) and that the “modern period of philosophical thought... dated from Hume to Kant” has “hampered” the “development of

¹⁴ Modern skepticism repudiates metaphysics in ways that both curb intelligent attention, and tacitly impose an incomplete, inadequate, unexamined metaphysics. Arguably, what materialism offers, as a metaphysics, is precisely control. In the preface to *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead comments that the scientific mentality thus asserts itself “at the expense of older points of view with their origins elsewhere”:

Each age has its dominant preoccupations; and, during the three centuries in question, the cosmology derived from science has been asserting itself at the expense of older points of view with their origins elsewhere. Men can be provincial in time, as well as in place. We may ask ourselves whether the scientific mentality of the modern world in the immediate past is not a successful example of such provincial limitation (ix).

cosmology and failed to conciliate philosophical conceptions of a real world with the world of daily experience” (PR 156).ⁱⁱⁱ

iii. The aims of this study

i. a speculative feminist reading of the British Romantics

One will already have gathered that what follows will deal with canonical male British Romantic poets, without challenging their canonicity, without adding particular historical detail to current scholarship about them, and without proving that they were, after all, not idealists but genuinely materialist nature poets. This study’s chief aim is instead an etho-ecological rereading of key British Romantic poems, from Wordsworth’s *Prelude* to Blake’s *Jerusalem* to Keats’s *Fall of Hyperion* to Shelley’s *Triumph of Life*. My emphasis falls on how these poems reverse the modern tendency to deanimate nature^{iv} and bar sensitive attention.¹⁵

One can see why I refrain from casting romantic¹⁶ poetry as environmentalist. An environment has none of *natura naturans*’s personified qualities. An environment is a naturalistic or scientific concept. I should add of course that sociologists of science, such as Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers, have been returning to the personified view of nature, though Latour might call it Gaia, and Stengers (after Haraway) might call it Medusa. Where Latour speaks of the Anthropocene, Haraway speaks of the Cthulucene, a term that removes the “anthro” from the

¹⁵ For those grown allergic to the notion of the natural, it may help to use Whitehead’s terms: the “egocentric” is experience in the mode of presentational immediacy (consciousness, cognition, sense-perception) and the “ecocentric” is experience in the mode of causal efficacy (prehension, sense-reception). For Whitehead, emphatically, all events are made of feeling or relation.

¹⁶ Henceforth I abandon the unwieldy capital R.

center and registers our shocked twenty-first century awareness of the destructive power of the Earth. Other speculative feminists have spoken of “animism reclaimed” (Stengers) and vitalist materialism (Braidotti, Bennett), in ways that resonate with and reinforce Haraway’s “tentacular” challenge to what might be called a patriarchal ban (instituted by science and religion) on the nonmodern notion of nature as personified, more-than-human, and feminine.

But it’s just a metaphor, isn’t it? No serious critical thinker and scholar could possibly expect readers to waste time on what amounts to an extended disquisition on the divine feminine (albeit in a speculative materialist and rigorously philosophical sense). One may avoid terms such as deep ecology and ecofeminism, and speak of “political ecology,” but is one not still dressing up a fringe spiritualism in academic robes? And, why admit it? Why not hide this longing to animate or personify nature behind a theory of the aesthetic or a theory of affect?

Again, I must reiterate that this is a study of the postsecular turn that romanticism initiated, and that modernity has tended to foreclose. The very word “romantic” has come to connote the illegitimacy of this etho-ecological attitude. To modernity, what is most unacceptable about the etho-ecological attitude is that it restores to view a metaphysics other than the modern metaphysics of discrete experience and discrete location: an ecocentric rather than egocentric metaphysics. Affect theorists, as I see it, have been drawn toward Whitehead precisely because of his postsecular insistence. Though his thought has survived mainly in process theology, Whitehead is not a Christian apologist. He directly challenges the modern repudiation of metaphysics. He is, then, first and foremost, a rigorous philosopher and intellectual historian who has pointed out the various confusions that follow from the modern doctrine. Whitehead does not hide this postsecularism behind theories of affect, aesthetics, or theology. Quite the opposite, he shows us that modernity has made postsecularism unthinkable.

ii. the conflation of affect with critical materialism

I must also reply to what I perceive as a problem in the uptake of affect theory in romantic studies. As Marjorie Levinson hints in “What Is New Formalism?”, new materialism(s) often work from incompatible, yet unacknowledged, epistemic assumptions. To clarify this point, the present study differentiates between critical materialism and speculative materialism, arguing that the former perpetuates modern optics and the latter offers an alternative haptics. In romantic studies, the dominant trend has been to take up affect through a critical materialist (meditationalist) rather than a speculative materialist (etho-ecological) lens. Scholars tend to reduce affect to sensation, and sensation to stimulation, as if affect (a term closer to emotion or relation than to passion or stimulation) could be adequately conceived in terms of passions that infect persons, or material effects that invade subjectivities, in ways that challenge the traditional notion of the essential or natural subject.

Recent scholarship on the mobility of affect has, for instance, emphasized the notion that foreign passions posed a threat to the essential British body, as constituted by traditional ideological discourses. These “contagious” affections are linked, in criticism, to science and technology, or to accelerating and proliferating forms of mediation. In that sense, by implication, the British Romantics inhabited a moment when an essential notion of identity and of nature was threatened by modernity and by the media age, which, with bewildering speed, presses for the constant infection or becoming-other of what tradition held to be essential.^v From that perspective, the role of the poet is to convert affect into emotion, master sensation with reflection, or curb the “microscopic” with the “philosophic” eye (Goodman). Affect, in that sense, must be mediated by

the poet, who converts sensation into reflection, difference into normative feeling (aesthetics, emotion).

While this may seem a nimble and intelligent account, it reduces affect to its conditioning effects and leaves out its deconditioning effects. I read affect in British Romantic poetry as largely a deconditioning power, continuous with what the romantics meant by “imagination” – a haptic intensity in excess of isolated consciousness. In romantic studies, however, affect is more often presented in terms of its passional and material rather than relational and animate qualities.¹⁷ It is largely to contest this reduction of affect to conditioning effects that I turn to Whitehead’s philosophy of organism, which can be said to undo the modern myth of separation or of private psychology without undermining (either through skepticism or mysticism) the intuition of personal experience.^{18vi}

In this respect, Whitehead, as Steven Shaviro points out, seems free of the compulsion to critique subjectivity. Instead, what he critiques is “the subject,” or the discursive center. His critique of subjectivism differs in important ways from social constructivist critique, because his interest is not to deny but to affirm (like Deleuze and other aesthetic ontologists) subjectivity in *excess* of discursive social constitution. In that sense, he radically affirms nature. He challenges

¹⁷ Theories of affect, applied to romantic studies, tend to presuppose a “sensationalist” model of experience, in which external stimulations indirectly cause mental occurrences. In this model, various forms of intersectional stimulation (including discursive stimulations) modify or affect a socially or “materially” constituted subject. Marx seems to have had this social constructivist model in mind when he proposed that consciousness does not produce the world (historical material conditions), the world produces consciousness. Affects, from this perspective, circulate in much the ways that dominant discourses circulate: as forms of stimulation or mediation that infect so-called individuals or so-called subjects. I write “so-called” because this model tends toward anti-subjectivism, or towards the explosion of the illusion of the natural or essential subject under critical analysis.

¹⁸ Perhaps the key point, to which I will frequently return, is that (at least for Whitehead) sensationalism actually waves away what one might, in ordinary speech, mean by sensation: feeling, shared interrelation, fluent sympathies. In its place, it installs a “private psychology” or an “extreme subjectivism” (Whitehead) for which experience involves only mental occurrences (the conversion of sense data into concepts) with no guarantee of an actual referent.

extreme subjectivism not because it is metaphysical but because it is a circumscription and foreclosure of the metaphysical.¹⁹

iv. A note on how this study is organized

Having addressed this study's aims, I will address its organizing principles. First, the introduction clarifies the contribution I hope to make to the current scholarship on affect and green romanticism. In doing so, I make a case for working one's way from affect theory to ecocriticism, rather than vice versa. I also make a case for romanticism's "deep ecology" less as a reactionary turn to essence than as an unsettling of the modern secular bar on metaphysics (in the particular sense of etho-ecological attention). My broadest aim in the introduction, and in this study as a whole, is to consider whether a romantic etho-ecological modernity is not beginning to flow again in certain strands of constructivist critical thought (science studies, political ecology, affect theory, speculative feminism) that respond to the global ecological emergency.

¹⁹ Whitehead deemphasizes not subjectivity but "the subject," as reflected in his famous maxim, "consciousness presupposes experience, and not experience consciousness" (PR 53). In other words, his philosophy of organism extends the notion of experience beyond centered limits. He speaks of both a reformed subjectivism and modified objectivism (or a confluence of the two). A premise of the present study is that Whitehead, like the British Romantics, offers an alternative to empiricist psychology. Anyone familiar with empiricist philosophy will recognize that it draws contact with reality into question. Humean skepticism, for instance, is marked by doubt over whether impressions are residual markings left upon the clay of the mind or mind-made interpretations. In Hume's "sensationalist psychology" (Whitehead), as in Locke, the "sensa" in sensation are "secondary qualities" or "psychic additions." Whitehead explicitly draws on romantic poetry to refute that skepticism.

One of the definitive features of this postsecularism, both in the early 19th Century and today, I propose, is its potential to foster a shift from optics to haptics, or from political economy to etho-ecology. In raising these questions about a postsecular turn that romances modernity, or that restores metaphysics to intellectual thought after its seventeenth century repudiation, I also take the opportunity to ask whether new materialist criticism is not unwittingly divided at present between the modern secular attitude and the postsecular attitude. This question can be taken as central to my thesis. Again and again, I return to it, asking (as Marjorie Levinson has done) whether the uptake of affect in new materialism is not actually confused by competing epistemologies: a “critical” materialist view of affect as passion or sensation and a “speculative” materialist view of affect as sympathy or relation.

After the first chapter lays the theoretical groundwork, the ensuing chapters apply the theory to the poets, in a loosely progressive manner. By loosely progressive, I mean that for the most part the analysis of authors and texts will follow historical chronology. The earlier chapters focus on first generation romantics, the later chapters on second generation romantics. For instance, the “coda” to this study deals mainly with *Frankenstein*, not a poem at all, treating it nonetheless as a work at the far end of the etho-ecological questions that Wordsworth opened, and, therefore, discussing it in tension with *The Prelude*. As Wordsworth and Blake were largely contemporaries, I treat them as such, but for rhetorical purposes do sometimes treat Wordsworth as the ground zero of romantic poetry’s etho-ecological concerns. In many ways, this is a study of Blake as a thoroughly etho-ecological culture agent, for which Wordsworth is valuable context. But Wordsworth is also crucial as an influence on Whitehead, whose philosophy of organism draws,

first and foremost, on romantic poetry's refusal to bifurcate nature or to present experience in terms of the modern split between primary and secondary qualities.²⁰

In treating second generation romantic poetry as a poetics of intensivity, and an intensification of first generation etho-ecological concerns, I bear in mind the historical fact that Keats and Shelley would have known little of Blake. Hence, a loosely progressive reading of the increasingly etho-ecological tendencies of romantic texts, or of their drive toward the virtual, requires the recognition of Wordsworth as the primary intertext. In that sense, another way of looking at the organization of the ensuing chapters is as the story of a series of responses to Wordsworth: from Blake to Keats to Percy Shelley to Mary Shelley. That said, this study centers on Blake, as the romantic most radically critical of modern optics.

In the second section of the introduction, "Green Romanticism's Ontic Hesitations," I argue that critical materialist commitments compel green romantic criticism to disavow the ontological turn. I look at Kevin Hutchings' *Imagining Nature*, which argues for the critical perspicacity of restricting ecocriticism to the "humble task of re-evaluating nature's status as a cultural concept" (Hutchings 3). Hutchings, in this context, argues that, despite his reputation, Blake was not anti-nature; what he subverted, instead, were cultural constructions of nature, or the concept of nature. I depart from Hutchings' "theoretically sophisticated approach to environmental politics" and question the terms environment and environmentalism central to Hutchings's mode of "truly self-reflexive" ecological criticism. My point is to argue that Hutchings exemplifies a somewhat

²⁰ In one of his instances of perhaps underappreciated and understated humor, he asks, "Why should we perceive secondary qualities? It seems an extremely unfortunate arrangement that we should perceive a lot of things that are not there. Yet this is what the theory of secondary qualities in fact comes to" (*Concept of Nature* 27).

conservative ecocriticism that adopts a secular, posthuman model of sheer difference rather than a postsecular, etho-ecological model.²¹

Part three of the introduction, “Romantic Sympathy: undoing the cut between attention and reality,” briefly discusses the possibility that critical theory continues to be informed by the conservatism of the “sensationalist doctrine.” I argue that new materialist criticism remains torn between speculative materialism (aesthetic ontology, haptics) and critical materialism (mediationalism, optics). Mediationism, I suggest, perpetuates the modern bid to confine sympathy to optics rather than haptics.

Chapter Two, “Haptic Aesthetics: Wordsworth, Whitehead, and Speculative Feminism,” introduces the basic optics/haptic distinction, on which this study hinges, via a simple metaphor favored by Wordsworth: the stone and the shell. I begin with close reading of Wordsworth to explore how, for the British Romantics, *books* – as compendiums of science and poetry – can be stones (sites of optic perception) or shells (sites of haptic prehension). Transitioning from an analysis of the implicit contrast that Wordsworth finds between modern optics and poetic attention, I look at Wordsworth’s famous statement, in Preface to *Lyric Ballads*, about a future convergence of these haptic and optic modes, or poetry and science, which may come to pass “[i]f 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” (PLB). I consider several key points this statement raises about the aesthetic links between pleasure, sympathy, relationship, imagination, love, and the living “universe.” On the whole, this chapter argues that Wordsworth’s aesthetic ontology constitutes an etho-ecology most recently expressed in speculative feminist theory that draws on Whitehead. I focus on Whitehead’s “reformed subjectivist principle” as the key

²¹ I link the term “secular” to the expulsion of speculative metaphysics from modern thought, or to a sensationalist psychology rooted in an “epistemological model of sense-perception” (Whitehead).

proposition not only for a postsecular modernity but for students of romantic poetry grappling in new ways with what it means to be faithful to (or “a lover of”) nature. Engaging with speculative feminist theory, I argue that the etho-ecological model of feeling intellect advanced in both Wordsworth and Whitehead (two apparently bland lovers of both theos and physis) is (to use Wordsworth’s phrase) “indeed important!” In the chapter’s final section, I spell out the ways in which etho-ecological thinking remains not only relevant but crucial to the transgressive quality of twenty-first century transversal and postsecular humanisms. The ensuing chapters each focus on one of the main nodes of this study: Blake, Dickinson, Keats, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley.

Chapter Three, “‘Earth’s Answer’: Etho-Ecology and Haptic Aesthetics in Blake,” undertakes a series of close readings of key Blake texts, including “Earth’s Answer,” “Laocoön,” “Auguries of Innocence,” “The Four Zoas,” “Milton,” and “Jerusalem.” On the whole, this chapter (drawing on recent scholarship by Lussier, Hutchings, Tweedy, Leslie, and Connolly) argues that Blake’s poetry, more graphic and more allegorical than Wordsworth’s, permits a visceral and holistic grasp of the problem of modern optics, or the “dark psychological consequences” (Quinney) of empiricism. Through close reading of “Earth’s Answer,” I identify Blake as a forerunner of “activist” philosophy and the “occurrent arts” (Massumi & Manning). Close reading of Blake’s *Laocoön* further explores Blake’s counter-cognitive poetics, in its challenge to modern optics. Increasingly, my “speculative materialist” reading of Blake is contrasted with Timothy Morton’s more “critical materialist” reading.

Chapter Four offers an extended comparison of the strategy of counter-epistemological humor (as a means of provoking a shift from optic to haptic perception) in Blake and Dickinson. It focuses on close reading of Blake and Dickinson’s “becoming-insect” poems: “The Fly” and “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –”.

Chapter Five plunges into the virtual ecologies of Shelley and Keats's dream-vision poems. It argues that the second-generation romantics (whose response to Wordsworth parallels Blake's) intensify the first-generation concern with etho-ecological attention.

Finally, the coda draws a contrast between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude* to suggest that Shelley had the last word on British Romantic poetry, and that she anticipated the etho-ecological concerns of speculative feminism.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Sympathy is not a vague feeling of respect or of spiritual participation: on the contrary, it is the exertion or the penetration of bodies... This is sympathy, assembling” (Deleuze, *Dialogues II*, 52-3).

1 The Etho-Ecological Dimensions of Affect in Romantic Poetry

New critical currents make it possible to register the etho-ecological dimensions of British Romantic poetry that Alfred North Whitehead extolled in a chapter of *Science and the Modern World* (1925) entitled “The Romantic Reaction.” These new currents include the recent constructivist turn to aesthetic ontology (speculative feminism, affect theory, political ecology), the resurgence of interest in Whitehead among radical empiricist thinkers (Stengers, Massumi, Shaviro), and the emergence of a post-secular turn (Stengers, Haraway, Braidotti, Connolly, Latour). For many, Whitehead is a quilting point of these nonmodern ideas. His thought, like that of the British Romantics (influenced by Spinoza and by the German naturphilosophes), exhibits a nonreductive, nondual model of *natura naturans*. Perhaps the clearest way to summarize the affinity between a process philosopher such as Whitehead and a romantic poet such as Wordsworth is to note that both work to restore metaphysics to visibility after the modern and secular ban on metaphysical speculation.²²

²² My work owes a debt to romantic scholars who (in “constructivist” ways) extend the notion of “immanent” aesthetics into the domain of affect (Levinson, Armstrong, Otto, Makdisi, Goldsmith, Francois, Yousef, Lussier, Hutchings, Rudy, Pyle, Mulrooney, Kroeber, Richardson, Kaufman, Jackson, Goodman, and Rajan, to name a few). I am also indebted to affect theorists (Massumi, Shaviro, Braidotti, Ivakhiv, Segall), and to the rare species of intellectual historian who merges political ecology with sociology of science (Stengers, Latour, Connolly, Bennett). A further debt is owed to contemplative science (Varela, Damasio) and to philosophy of mind (Thompson). I also acknowledge a more profound debt to some of the thinkers listed above in the context of speculative feminist materialism (Haraway, Stengers, Braidotti), which transverses affect theory, science studies, multispecies studies, and political ecology. Perhaps the deepest debt is owed to a “counter-epistemological” (West) and radical empiricist genealogy of western philosophers (Spinoza, Bergson, James, Whitehead, Deleuze) who developed an “integral” mode of speculative thought, for which the “ultimate” is only “actual in virtue of its accidents” (PR 7).

One of my hopes, in undertaking this study, is to present a Whiteheadian reading that proves interesting to “green” romantic criticism, which has recently been moving toward an ecocriticism informed by affect theory. Drawing on the work of theorists such as Stacy Alaimo and Ron Broglio, who “have used literature and science to interrogate ecocriticism’s core epistemologies,” Lisa Ottum and Seth T. Reno, the editors of *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics*, have signaled the ways in which “Romanticism’s ‘green’ affects challenge conventional narratives of environmentalism” (Ottum and Reno 17).

Affect theory, I agree, promises to move ecocriticism past the “epistemological model of sense perception” (Whitehead) that focuses on environment and environmentalism. I would caution, however, that both affect theory and ecocriticism have been impacted by an ongoing tendency to fail to adequately consider the competing epistemic assumptions of various “new materialism(s)” (Levinson). Specifically, not enough attention has been paid to the difference between critical materialist and speculative materialist epistemic assumptions. I would argue that this difference is very much that of optics and haptics. In the former, experience is mediational and representational. In the latter, experience is interrelational. Where the former (critical materialism) assumes and perpetuates the modern optics of finitude or isolated location, the latter (speculative materialism) breaks with this dogmatic metaphysics in a postsecular turn that makes metaphysics (in the etho-ecological sense) thinkable again. In both affect theory and ecocriticism, especially as taken up in romantic studies, the tendency has been to eschew this postsecular turn in favor of rebranded forms of critical materialism that leave the ontological links between sensing, feeling, thinking, and acting under erasure.

Ottum and Reno seem to intuit this difficulty, looking to political ecologist (and constructivist thinker) Jane Bennett for new understanding of “the relationship of various affective

intensities to ethics” (17). Alaimo, likewise, emphasizes “a material ethics” based on the “porousness” of bodies, or on “‘trans-corporeality’, a framework that foregrounds the ‘movement across bodies’ and the ‘material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world’” (5). What I appreciate in *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics* is, then, its at times refreshingly naïve engagement with a more-than-human aesthetic ontology. One of the immediate risks in this approach is its susceptibility to the charge of “deep ecology.”

As reflected in this recent volume of green romantic criticism, affect theory *has* enabled the thinking through of an “etho-ecology” (Stengers) that need not necessarily disavow its links to “deep ecology” – the holism of which has been sharply critiqued, but which, like affect theory, draws on Spinoza, and has had an impact on posthumanist feminists such as Rosi Braidotti. New materialism(s) do owe a debt to deep ecology, particularly its critique of “shallow environmentalism” (Naess). *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics* prompts, indirectly and directly, a reconsideration of deep ecology (and ecofeminism), via affect theory.²³

As indicated by the scope of Green Romantic scholarship in this recent volume edited by Ottum and Reno, the last two decades have seen a more radical uptake of affect theory in romantic studies, one that links the aesthetic to affect, and both to ontology. Increasingly, a “green” fusion of affect and aesthetics challenges the Kantian assumption that the aesthetic is mainly a matter of subjective forms of human cognition, or of representational processes. A constructivist criticism is questioning the traditional modern view, which dismisses the “aesthetic insistence” (Pyle) of the nonrepresentational world, relegated to a bristling manifold outside of human experience.

²³ Though deep ecology has been criticized for being Heideggerian in its emphasis on essence, and misanthropic in its privileging of deeper “being” over individuality and human subjectivity, Michael Zimmerman cites ecophilosopher Warwick Fox’s comment that the standard critique of deep ecology as radically ecocentric (and thus anti-human) commits “the fallacy of ‘misplaced misanthropy.’”

Affect, or the notion of a “primitive” (nonconscious, noncognitive, nonhuman) level of experience that is “emotional” or relational,²⁴ makes the aesthetic influence of the nonrepresentational world thinkable again. After the constructivist turn in philosophy, which Jane Bennett traces to the late work of Foucault, and of Deleuze, one can perhaps hear anew Whitehead’s affirmation of romantic poetry’s “feeling for nature, as exhibiting entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presences of others” (SMW 84). One can attend again to romantic poetry’s challenge to exceptional human consciousness. One can register romantic poetry’s resistance to the modern bars on sympathy in its heretically metaphysical sense. In this context, romanticism’s deep ecology (Lussier) is less a reactionary turn to pure Nature than (particularly in Blake) an unsettling of the modern bar on etho-ecological attention.²⁵

Arguably, even in ecocriticism after the affective turn, a critical materialist optics prevails.^{vii} Critical materialism register the ways in which the haptic disrupts the eye or the optic.²⁶ Yet it tends to construe this disruption as digital rather than analog, or as serial rather than interrelational.²⁷ As a result, even scholars and theorists drawing on Deleuzian aesthetics and on

²⁴ For Spinoza, affect “is not confined to the image or idea; it is of another nature, being purely transitive, and not indicative or representative, since it is experienced in a lived duration that involves the difference between two states” (SPP 49).

²⁵ One of the problems of the representational model is that it tends to imagine the aesthetic, with Kant, in terms of a cognitive process by which we become conscious of intuitions “only after acts of synthesis and only by inference from these acts, not directly” (Brook). The Kantian model of imagination (as an image-making faculty) arguably enlists it in forms of experience that the romantics would have found to be forms of inadequate imagination, or to be distinctly *unimaginative* (See endnote vi).

²⁶ The task of registering the ways in which romantic poetry “re-animates” the world, or undoes the excision of speculative metaphysics, is made easier if one takes the short route of distinguishing aesthetics in epistemological and metaphysical modes. To clarify this point, I use the terms “optic” and “haptic.” In the language of speculative philosophy, the optic corresponds to the “actual” (Bergson) or “presentational immediacy” (Whitehead), and the haptic to the “virtual” (Bergson) or “causal efficacy” (Whitehead). The optic or ocular implies a static bifurcating mode (sensation/reflection) while the haptic implies a fluent nondual mode (touch, affect, sympathy).

²⁷ See Claire Colebrook’s *Blake, Deleuzian Aesthetics, and the Digital*.

affect theory persist in reading the haptic dimension of romantic poetry less as etho-ecological²⁸ interrelation than as nonhuman alterity.²⁹ To complicate matters, depending on one's approach, one is likely to take a different view on whether these stimulations are natural or cultural. Some emphasize the alterity of affect. Others emphasize that affects are cultural, but mobile and contagious. The aesthetic ontology that one finds in late Deleuze (*Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*) and in late Whitehead (*Process and Reality*) tends instead to think the haptic as *natura naturans* or as “the love of nature” (Ottum and Reno) in a more personified, or less deanimated, sense. By “love of nature,” I refer not to the love that a human agent may feel for nature but, instead, etho-ecological feeling in excess of agents.

Critical materialist suspicion of deep ecology's mysticism and fanaticism, and its related skepticism about ecofeminism's essentialism, may need reevaluation, then, because it does not seem to register deep ecology's concern with the “love” of nature. That is, critical materialism seems to stubbornly miss the whole point of deep ecology: the possibility of an interrelational ground of subjectivity.³⁰ Here, it would seem that Ottum and Reno themselves cloud their argument by placing the “love of nature” too far to the side of the observer, rather than understanding it (with their contributor, Alaimo) as an event of more-than-human etho-ecological flow. That is, Ottum and Reno might clarify their affect-oriented green romanticism via a

²⁸ Eve Sedgwick uses the term “phenomenological,” which I avoid because phenomenology tends to bracket metaphysics in ways that tacitly privilege the optic over the haptic.

²⁹ In that sense, the haptic is the incursion of sheer alterity, or the nonrepresentational, into representational consciousness. In a milder form, from this perspective, the haptic is also the incursion of foreign affections or enthusiasms (otherness) into the culturally constituted body (identity).

³⁰ From this perspective, deep ecology is not anti-human at all. Rather, it implies that the word “human” means “interrelational.” In modernity, the potential for humaneness, in this sense, is curbed and censored by a centered optics of “self-interest,” and by a “materialist” skepticism that tacitly rejects etho-ecological metaphysics. Modern epistemic regimes privilege optics over haptics, or what Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* calls animation by ideas rather than animation by tenderness.

speculative feminism and constructivism that considers, with greater precision, *why* a postsecular model of *natura naturans* has been barred.

In the introduction to *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics*, Ottum and Reno explain that “[t]his collection of essays seeks to recover the emotion of Romantic environmentalism – to consider love of nature not as hopelessly naïve or escapist but as generative of ecological thinking” (Ottum and Reno 2). To my mind, the vague phrase “ecological thinking” cries out for a more rigorously philosophical discussion, via Whitehead, of the unbifurcated event of etho-ecological attention. In proposing that a key objective of the collection of essays is to “enhance our understanding of how feelings generate ecological thinking” (3), Otto and Reno never quite seem to register that the “love of nature” implies the relaxation of the epistemic bars on etho-ecological attention. In highlighting the link between a “love of nature” and environmentalism, green criticism all-too-easily limits itself to the pedestrian fact that romantic poetry has been a ground for environmental thought and literature, trivializing a potentially deeper engagement with its “history or science of feelings.”

That said, despite a cloudiness introduced by what Whitehead might call “intellectualism” or scholasticism, Ottum, Reno, and the various contributors to *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics*, do move toward an ecocriticism for which the “recovery” of nature has less to do with gaining back a lost original purity or immediacy than with *undoing* the modern foreclosures of affective sympathies. Recovery, after all, can mean uncovering what has been covered – less a lyric longing for a lost totality than a “reclaimed realism” (Segall) that challenges the modern “phenomenal veil” (PR 142). To my ear, Ottum and Reno put this challenge rather too mildly or conservatively, in writing that a new materialist ecocriticism might “recover the emotion of Romantic environmentalism... as generative of ecological thinking.”

Still, the introduction to *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics* provides an exemplary overview of Green Romantic criticism and its potential trajectories. Ottum and Reno engage with issues that have long been central to my own postsecular project.³¹ They register in romantic poetry the ongoing potential of an alternative modernity (in which a category like “ecology” is indivisible from talk of affect or aesthetic ontology). For Ottum and Reno, ecologies of affect imply a kind of kinship (what Wordsworth, in *Tintern Abbey*, calls a “bond of brotherhood”) that translates into an ethos of care. “[T]o love the natural world,” they suggest, “implies... a need to protect and preserve that world for future generations” (2). Implicitly, their claim seems to be that nineteenth-century ecological literature, and its influence on modern environmentalism, is grounded less in idealization of nature (in reaction to the deracinations of modern industrial society) than in felt etho-ecological interrelation: “Wordsworth’s re-presentation of the natural world as an affective state continuous with ecological consciousness characterizes a wide range of nineteenth-century literature” (2).

If critics are beginning to register romantic feeling as etho-ecological feeling, then Ottum and Reno suggest that “such a recovery is now possible” thanks to the growing “subfield” of “literature and science,” and thanks to “developments in affect studies and Romantic ecocriticism” (2). Here they acknowledge the work of ecocritics (Timothy Morton, Ashton Nichols, Theresa Kelley) who have foregrounded “Romantic literature’s debt to nineteenth-century scientific, medical, and philosophical discourses” (2). They also credit others (Richard Sha, Adela Pinch, Thomas Pfau, Alan Richardson) with “fruitfully appl[ying] cognitive science and affect theory to the study of Romantic texts, changing our view of emotion and its relationship to thought and

³¹ Namely, working out the implications of affect theory for an ecocritical reading of romantic poetry – a project that involves an attention to romantic ecologies of affect (or what they call romanticism’s “feeling ecology”) that, in turn, may help in “recovering ecology’s affects” (Ottum, Reno).

action” (2). Springing from these interdisciplinary trends in embodied philosophy, the essays in *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics* “[complicate] existing notions of what constitutes ‘green’ thinking in the nineteenth-century and of the forces that give rise to modern environmental ethics” (2).

As I read it, Ottum and Reno emphasize “proto-ecological” (Kroeber) dimensions of romantic “nature poetry” in ways that actually run counter to the critical commonplace that explains romantic aesthetics in terms of its debt to nineteenth-century scientific, medical, and philosophical discourses. Ecological consciousness may sound like a consciousness of which only modern people, informed by science, are capable. Yet, as I have been arguing, it seems more apposite to argue that if romantic aesthetics is (proto)ecological, then it is so in the sense of deep ecology rather than environmentalism. In that sense, its roots are in a nonmodern model of *natura naturans* that implicitly redresses the bioinformatic optics that underpins the term environment. To the extent that Ottum and Reno echo the view that romantic aesthetics was inspired by sensationalist nineteenth-century (scientific, medical, and philosophical) discourses, they seem to limit the notion of romantic “green thinking” to naturalism and obscure its relationship with etho-ecological attention. When they write that they are concerned with “how feelings generate ecological thinking,” a certain imprecision persists in the term “feeling.” Do feelings refer only to human subjective feeling or also to nonmodern flows of extra-being? This question is important, as romantic poetry is vitally concerned with the relaxation of cognition into the more primordial, noncognitive mode that Whitehead calls prehension. Romantic writing, like Whitehead’s writing,

challenges the optics of “isolated location.”³² The “love of nature” is, in that sense, descriptive less of a naturalistic appreciation that humans feel for nature than of nature’s ontological quality.

That aside, Ottum and Reno provide a concise overview, apparently modeled on Kroeber’s overview in *Ecological Literary Criticism*, of the critical conditions from which ecocriticism and affect studies have emerged. Their account of new historicist criticism might be amplified by Kroeber’s view that the Yale critics recast the romantics less as nature poets than as poets of transcendental mind, and that new historicism put this idealist image of the romantics to more skeptical uses:

Ecocriticism and affect studies both emerge, in part, as responses to the dominance of new historicism in the 1980s, and both have developed along parallel lines. Ecocriticism initially sought to restore nature to Romanticism after its marginalization by new historicist critique. Influential studies by Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and Alan Liu convinced many readers to see Romantic Nature as an escape from sociopolitical realities, a fundamental part of the so-called Romantic Ideology. According to this reading, Romantic poets idealize nature as a way to displace political failures (e.g., the French Revolution) as well as personal and philosophical anxieties (e.g., the apparent lack of order or unity to the universe). Among the most provocative new historicist assertions was Liu’s (in)famous declaration that “there is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government”... Seen in this way, the Romantics’ version of nature was far from ecological: it was all idea and ideology. (Ottum and Reno, 3)

For Kroeber, the purpose of ecocriticism was to return to a less polemical understanding of the romantics in their engagement with nature.

Yet, the ecocritical reading of the romantics has evolved a great deal since it was initiated by Kroeber and Bate. As Larry Buell and other ecocritics have done, Ottum and Reno trace three

³² For Whitehead, as for Bergson, the critique of spatial circumscription, or of reification, is also a critique of temporal circumscription. If one concedes, philosophically, that the isolation of objects is a conceptual abstraction (a kind of empiricist convenience), and that concretely things actually exist in movement, interchange, and interrelation (in flux rather than stasis), then one is free to replace the idea of the object with that of the *event*. The defining feature of the event is that it is *non-isolated*, both spatially and temporally. All other events are present in each event. This is not conjecture for Whitehead but a logical consequence of the critique of isolated location, or of abstraction.

“waves” of eco-criticism: a first wave that “challenged new historicism by insisting on the materiality of Romantic nature and by establishing Romantic writers as heralds of the environmental tradition” (3), a second wave that “returned in diverse and often divergent ways to new historicism” (4), and a third wave that “moves beyond the field’s self-assessment to develop interdisciplinary approaches” (5). “Recent ecocriticism,” they write, “is therefore less concerned with recovering Romantic Nature from historicist critique than it is with exploring the relationships between literature, science, the visual arts, and philosophy” (5). In particular, they find promise in emerging critical attention to the “traffic between Romantic-era science and Romantic literature and visual art” (5): “Besides the fact that such interdisciplinary work offers a striking new portrait of Romanticism itself, it has also moved third-wave ecocriticism toward fruitful lines of theoretical inquiry” (5).

Here they make important reference to theorists such as Alaimo and Broglio, who challenge “eco-criticism’s core epistemologies” (5), highlighting the fact that third-wave ecocriticism is affect-oriented and constructivist, departing from old quarrels with new historicism over the ontological status of nature for more nuanced concerns with aesthetic and affective ontologies. In my own work, I have likewise kept the core epistemologies of competing forms of new materialism at the forefront of my mind, the better to distinguish between a “critical” materialism that reads affect as information/stimulation (optic, digital), and a “speculative” materialism that reads affect as transmission of feeling (haptic, analog). Helpfully, then, Ottum and Reno register that romantic models of imagination (as prehension, or intensivity) bridge matter, sensation, aesthetics, and the etho-ecological:

Retaining second-wave ecocriticism’s emphasis on materiality, third-wave eco-theory... further unsettles the subject-object distinction that underpins anthropocentrism. Equally important, it also proposes provocative – and useful – ways of challenging and reimagining agency to include animals, chemical processes, and even inanimate objects. Third-wave

ecocriticism is as concerned with how we think and feel about the material world as it is with how artists depict “nature.” The interrelated acts of thinking, feeling, and expressing are now seen as part of a complex ecological sensibility that registers at both scientific and aesthetic levels. (5)

Insightfully, Ottum and Reno point out that “[s]imilar to the study of ecology, the study of affect was incipient in the nineteenth century” (8), emphasizing a romantic concern with affect rather than objectified nature. Briefly, they touch upon romantic models of *sympathy*, hinting (like Saree Makdisi) at a romantic challenge (and not simply an excited response) to the sensationalist psychology at work in the science-infused writings of 1790s intellectuals. More nuance is possible on this issue of romantic sympathy and late eighteenth century scientific vitalism. Although Ottum and Reno emphasize the continuities between the two, my own understanding is that romantic poetry intervened and radically inverted the sensationalist “science of feeling.”^{viii} In this sense the “transformation in basic human relationships” that the romantic poets fostered was very different from the one sought by writers such as Erasmus Darwin.^{ix} However, the important point is that the romantics were in dialogue with this discourse. As Ottum and Reno observe:

Following their eighteenth-century forebearers, the Romantics were deeply interested in matters such as the transmission and mediation of “sympathy.” Indeed, Romantic *poets* were especially engaged with their era’s “science of feeling”: far from embracing the aesthetic as “an independent realm of experience,” Wordsworth, Coleridge, Percy Shelley, and other writers shared with Erasmus Darwin and other prominent scientists “an acute interest in the organs and activities of human sense perception” (Jackson, 2, 3). Noel Jackson therefore challenges us to rethink historicist caricatures of Wordsworth as the poet of “sublime disembodiment,” arguing that Wordsworth “explicitly conceived his work as an experiment in embodied aesthetic response” (9, 202). Similarly, Richard Sha highlights the Romantics’ engagements with the era’s science and medicine, reframing earlier portrayals of the Romantics as wholly abstract and escapist thinkers by showing how they “sought nothing less than the transformation of basic human relationships” (16). This effort to map connections between Romantic literature and science invites us to reframe Romantic literary emotions in more complex terms than they appear in earlier critical accounts... [as] a

concerted attempt... to theorize affect and its relationship to emotion, cognition, and ethics.
(7-8)³³

On the question of the continuities between romantic poetry and romantic science, Ottum and Reno attend, particularly, to an essay by Allison Dushane, entitled “Reverie and the Life of Things: Rousseau, Darwin, and Romantic Visionary Materialism,” which traces a “genealogy of vitalist thought” from Rousseau to Deleuze “that situates ‘affective and aesthetic engagement with material nature’ as a means to imagine human action and subjectivity” (16).^x

On the whole, Ottum and Reno refrain from distinguishing between the competing epistemic assumptions at work in various new materialism(s), emphasizing instead the “wonder” involved in the encounters of both scientific and poetic attention to material process. In the current study, I have attempted to trace the concept of autopoiesis in the sciences, and in philosophy of mind, the better to register an ongoing tendency to bracket metaphysics as if it were illegitimate, yet tacitly preserve an abstract metaphysics of isolated location. Such analysis of the core epistemologies of new materialist criticism is important because, I would argue, the uptake of affect theory in romantic studies has already produced confusion; some critics take up affect in the context of critical materialism, others in the context of speculative materialism, the two sides disagreeing without acknowledging their competing epistemic assumptions.^{xi}

³³ Noel Jackson’s *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry*, I would argue, recapitulates (even as it troubles) the Lockean sensation-reflection binary. Though he rescues Wordsworth from the charge of reflective disembodiment, he (like Kevis Goodman) seems to associate sensation with stimulation in ways that miss the romantic middle term: sympathy.

2 Green Romanticism's Ontic Hesitations

"...It shall be my pride
That I have dared to tread this holy ground,
Speaking no dream but things oracular,
Matter not lightly to be heard..."
(*The Prelude* Book 12, 250 – 253)

As my response to *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics* suggests, an etho-ecological reading of romantic poetry has the merits of challenging the conservative and traditional flavor that romantic studies tends to give green criticism and affect theory. Green romantic criticism often eschews an ontological turn (i.e., a turn to un-bar ontology) that, one might assume, lies at the heart of its ecocritical concerns.³⁴ For instance, Kevin Hutchings opens *Imagining Nature* with a disclaimer that given the "impossibility" of any attempt to recover "nature's non-human essence," his "ultimate aim involves not the 'recovery' of nature but the more humble task of re-evaluating nature's status as a cultural concept" (Hutchings 3). In the same breath, however, he adds that in examining these "uses" of nature he hopes "tentatively to delineate an alternative, distinctively Blakean view of the relationship between humanity and nature, a view that productively challenges the traditional western notion that humans should exercise a hierarchical and narrowly anthropocentric 'dominion' over the entire non-human portion of creation" (3).

³⁴ Such an attitude would seem to align with social ecologist Murray Bookchin's argument that ecological problems are rooted in cultural attitudes, and therefore require not an ontological turn but shifts brought about by cultural critique.

Broadly, Hutchings argues that Blake's "paradoxical reputation as an anti-nature Romantic author" is actually rooted in his "suspicion of contemporary concepts of nature," or his keen awareness that Enlightenment science's pose of "ostensible objectivity dangerously disguised the ideological assumptions supporting its practice" (4). One could say, perhaps more directly, that when Blake refers to "vegetative Nature" and to "Creation," he is referring to outward and objectified nature, as perceived through empiricist optics.³⁵ Hutchings cites Foucault's observation that "the subject in the discourse of eighteenth-century naturalists becomes exclusively a subject *looking* according to a grid of perceptions, *noting* according to a code" (Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," 56-7, cited in Hutchings 4). With Foucault, he links Francis Bacon's discourse of Enlightenment naturalism, or the "indefinite discourse of eighteenth-century empiricism" to the "techniques of inquiry associated with the Inquisition" (5):

Indeed, as Foucault remarks, the all-encompassing knowledge of empirical naturalism – which played an important role in the economic and political conquest of the western world – is inseparable from the Inquisition's all-encompassing 'politico-judicial, administrative and criminal, religious and lay, investigation. (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 226, cited in Hutchings 5).

In short, Hutchings, from the outset, emphasizes the ways in which the romantic poets demonstrate an awareness that how one imagines nature is not a naïve act, but a political one. From here, it is perhaps a small step to the further argument that the romantics demonstrate an awareness that this act of imagination *does* involve, if not a kind of constructivist return to "naïve" lived experience or "organized innocence" (Blake), at least a kind of realism.

Hutchings may not take this Whiteheadian step out of the "subjectivist principle" into "organic realism" or "modified objectivism" (Whitehead), but given the increasingly rich contexts for political ecology today, it seems possible to be a bit less careful to disclaim in advance the

³⁵ Blake's *There Is No Natural Religion* makes this critique of empirical naturalism explicit.

possibility of noncognitive prehension of interrelation in deference to the “more humble task of re-evaluating nature’s status as a cultural concept.” Political ecology, and its “immanent naturalism” (Connolly), after all, precisely asks into why etho-ecological flow has become invisible to modern optics, or debarred from modern experience.

In this context, I would like to both register, and depart from, Hutchings’s orientation, which he characterizes as a “theoretically sophisticated approach to environmental politics [that] by acknowledging the interimplication of environmentalism and the exercise of power, offers the possibility of formulating an ecological criticism that is truly self-reflexive, a criticism that builds on other modes of critical analysis rather than rejecting them” (14). In a Blakean spirit not of critical antagonism but of “wars of life, & wounds of love with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought” (*Jerusalem*, 38:14), I take exception to the terms environment and environmentalism central to Hutchings’s mode of ecological criticism. I would agree with Timothy Morton that ecological “critique” does better to dispense with the objectifying term “environment,” though, quite contrary to Morton, I see romantic vision emphatically as a vision of ecology that unsettles rather than produces the idea of an environment.

When Hutchings speaks of environmentalism, he does so, apparently, to claim that Blake’s poetics is “environmental,” less because it speaks for nature than because it leaves nature in its “alterity” even as it exposes the ideological coercions of institutional discourses that present themselves as natural. In this way, for Hutchings, Blake challenges institutional discourses even as he avoids producing his own naturalized discourse. In that sense, he reads Blake as an exemplar of insistently self-reflexive (or “self-annihilatory”)³⁶ ecological politics. Aiming to “construct an ecological politics that can both address its attendant social conflicts and self-reflexively negotiate

³⁶ See Mark Lussier, “Self-Annihilation/Inner Revolution: Blake’s ‘Milton’, Buddhism, and Ecocriticism.”

inevitable complicities with the problems it seeks to resolve” (13), Hutchings turns to ecocritic David Mazel, who argues:

“Rather than treating environmentalism as a conceptually ‘pure’ and unproblematic *resistance* to power, a resistance based upon an objective and disinterested organization of knowledge, I suggest we analyze it as just one of many potential modes for *exercising* power, as a particular ‘style,’ both political and epistemological, ‘for dominating, restructuring, and having authority’... over the real territories and lives that the [concept of] environment displaces and for which it is invoked as a representation” (Mazel, “American Literary Environmentalism as Domestic Orientalism,” *The Ecocriticism Reader* 3, cited in Hutchings 14).

I re-cite this here in order to tease Hutching’s model of “environmental politics” apart from constructivist models of political ecology. One of the operative ideas in the passage he quotes from Mazel is that “environment” is a concept that “displaces” the relations “for which it is invoked as a representation.” Environment, in this view, is one mastering narrative in competition with other mastering narratives, in the context of an implied milieu of competing historical discourses. In keeping with this argument, Hutchings places the “real” in quotation marks, as if to indicate that the real is a “materiality” outside of “discursive practices,” and hence unknowable. As he writes, “[a] double emphasis on the discursive *and* the ‘real’ provides the ground for a dialectic that aims at altering destructive human discursive practices while acknowledging the materiality – and attempting to respect the profound alterity or unknowability – of non-human nature” (14).

My own mild objection to this method of environmental criticism is that it tacitly recapitulates the modern debarral of etho-ecological intuitions or sympathies. In that sense, it outright substitutes a secular posthuman model of alterity for the nonmodern postsecular model of sympathy so vital to romantic poesis. Alterity is, I would argue, what a modern optics sees in the manifold of intuition, a field of impinging stimulations converted into commonsense via aesthetic image-making processes.

Admittedly, in speaking of the “materiality... of nonhuman nature” in terms of a “profound alterity or unknowability,” Hutchings signals a model of “zoe” that is neither stripped of sweetness nor reduced to bare life, but such a model still seems to fly in the face of the romantic emphasis (salient in Wordsworth and Blake) on, precisely, the *familiarity* and tenderness rather than the absolute mystery of the more-than-human. In place of the postsecular romantic proposition that such sympathies inform the event of sensitive attention – and in fact are the life of each etho-ecological moment of experience (such that “everything that lives is full of blessings”) – Hutchings substitutes a secular posthuman model of sheer difference. As a consequence, he is obliged to read Blake’s “double vision” less as a contrast between extensivity (atomistic apprehension) and intensivity (more-than-atomistic prehension) than between a “darker, more sober understanding” of experience as fundamentally discursive and a “poet’s desire to imagine the things of nature in ideal and infinite terms” – i.e., a properly intellectual and anti-aesthetic stance versus a lyric, aesthetic one.

Again, Hutchings himself does not rule out a non-human world of “extra-cultural ‘givens’, unbounded and uncontaminated by human interventions,” but here he does strongly imply that a certain lack of sobriety (or “enthusiasm”) drives the poet to want to think of this extra-cultural field as “pure” or “uncontaminated,” and “ideal” and “infinite.” The poet who expresses these etho-ecological stirrings is, in effect, carried away with himself. Imagination does not involve actual affection by these interrelations. Rather, imagination involves a desire to impose a homogeneous form or image on heterogeneous things: an image of purity and infinity.³⁷

³⁷ By infinity, Hutchings ostensibly means an abstract or pure infinity, which, I would argue, is incommensurable with Blake’s use of this term. That is, Hutchings refers to an “optic” rather than a “haptic” infinity.

As Hutchings writes, “In much of Blake’s visionary poetry, representations of nature and natural objects embody a sense of doubleness, evincing tension between what we might see as the poet’s desire to imagine the things of nature in ideal and infinite terms (i.e., as extra-cultural ‘givens’, unbounded and uncontaminated by human interventions), and his darker, more sober understanding of their inescapable discursivity.” (14) He refers to Blake’s visionary poetry as evoking this “tension” or “doubleness,” as if etho-ecological feeling were an imaginative imposition (a mere Lockean “psychic addition”), and as if the darker vision of discursivity were more acutely perceptive.

This model, I would argue, inverts the actual dynamics of Blake’s visionary poetry, which (as critics as diverse as Quinney, Lussier, and Makdisi argue) presents the natural world as an epistemic construction (or as a product of the institutionally constituted senses) in order to highlight the profound mental suffering involved in the isolated psychology of the modern empiricist subject. In that sense, the haptic “infinity” to which Blake insistently gestures is not a fantasy, but a definite experiential potential. Modern suffering stems from the preclusion of this potential, or the epistemic limits set upon sensitive attention. For Blake, when the modern optics of finitude is seen as a human exceptionalist fantasy, the fluency and intensity of the world is an indivisible quality of attention. What lies outside the optics of finitude is not at all the fantasy of pure pleasure that supplements, displaces, and perpetuates a dissatisfactory reality. On the contrary, as Whitehead clarifies (after William James’s critique of mediationalism), the moderns (via the skeptical and human exceptionalist subjectivist principle) have circumscribed experience or attention in ways that interdict felt interrelation; the relaxation of that interdiction involves a “reclaimed realism” (Segall).^{xii}

One can read Blake's famous infernal proverb – "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite" – to mean that if the modern epistemic regimes that produce the isolated human center are relaxed, then etho-ecological sympathy or intensity is an experiential event. When he refers, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, to "the infinite that was hid," he is not necessarily referring to an abstract and sublime concept of an infinite, beyond ordinary human experience, but to a sane "belief in the world" (Deleuze) after the "doubt" (Blake) – as it were, the stone rolled in front of attention – implicit in modern epistemology. Such a reading accords with Blake scholars from Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom to Steven Goldsmith and Mark Lussier, who emphasize that in Blake the "inner apocalypse" (Bloom) enacts a return to lived intuition, or a renovation of attention *to* the world, in its promiscuity and contingency, rather than a religious rejection of the world for a "pure discourse" beyond the embodied human condition.³⁸

I raise this issue of the tendency of green romanticism to disavow the alternative modernity that it courts – critically acknowledging its "impossibility" and resigning itself to examining, "nature's status as a cultural concept" – because such an approach seems to forestall green romanticism's engagement with the debarred etho-ecological potential made visible again by political ecology, and to limit scholars in the field to asking how the relationship between people and the landscape is imagined and how it is structured, intersectionally, by sociological institutions. As I will take up in chapter one, romantic poetry offers figures (the stone and shell) that presses back, in advance, against the reduction of intensity to extensivity or of haptics to

³⁸ In the wider context of *The Prelude*, one may recall that, for Wordsworth as for Blake, the apocalypse is not at the end of history, but happens in the world to individuals, in the moment of perceptual renovation. In that context, the resurrection or renovation undoes the modern gothic optics of life-in-death, that "horrible, dreamful slumber" or "linkèd infernal chain" from which grows a "vast Spine writh'd in torment" (*Book of Urizen* 199-201)

optics. To live up to its potential, green romanticism may well need to look at these figures of counter-cognition *within* romantic poetry.

3 Romantic Sympathy: undoing the cut between attention and reality

In many ways, I see Marjorie Levinson's engagement with embodied philosophy and affect theory in "A Motion and a Spirit: Romancing Spinoza" as exemplary of the direction green romanticism might take. Before I turn to a discussion³⁹ of Levinson's affect-informed "new formalism," I would like to clarify one of the nodal points of my argument: the idea that sympathy, in romantic writing, holds much more radical connotations than it does today, and hence the hypothesis that sympathy is now the missing middle term in our critical understanding of what may appear to be an ambivalent tension in romantic poetry between sensation (science, stimulation) and reflection (culture, aesthetic ideology).⁴⁰

In empiricist models, sympathy is not a primary event of sensation but a secondary product of reflection. Configured this way, along the Lockean sensation-reflection divide, sympathy poses

³⁹ Primarily in 2.4 "Aesthetic linkages: pleasure, sympathy, relationship" and in Appendix B, "Countercultural Perception."

⁴⁰ Historically, the romantics were responding to a biopolitical sanitization of sympathy, advanced as much by the "radical" sensationalists as by the "conservative" emotionalists. While the sensationalists celebrated the ways in which technological progress exposed the deadened and irrational body politic to rational and reanimating ideas (Paine), their (bio)politics was rooted in a scientific materialist skepticism about feeling; beneath the forms of subjective feeling, and the untrustworthy senses, the modern rational empiricist agent could discover, and organize, cold, arbitrary, atomistic matter. Likewise, though the emotionalists celebrated natural feeling as the ground of social feeling, their politics was rooted in a barren model of sensation; the sympathetic feeling on which they set such stock was a class-contingent product of refined "reflection," set against "sensation" as the contagious enthusiasms of the irrational corporeal masses. Adam Smith, for instance, redefines sympathy less as affect and emotion than as calculative, self-interested judgment.

no threat (of promiscuous interrelation) to pure forms of British (masculine, white, educated, enfranchised) identity. Where, in Wordsworth, sympathy is a primary mode of experience, in Adam Smith it is a rational capacity, sanitized of metaphysical (or more-than-discretely-physical) resonances. Smith's moral psychology represents a version of what Whitehead describes as the "private psychology" of empiricism in the skeptical and sensationalist mode, a psychology intimately bound up with discourses of progress, or the "individualizing process of modernization" (Makdisi). In that sense, the aim of Smith's moral philosophy is to curb the threat of sympathy, for an imperial economics, an optics of mastery and self-interest justified by its power to govern less rational agents.

If Wordsworth's poetry is never quite free of this Anglocentric discourse of moral education, still a salient thread of his utopianism has less to do with western progress (over which he has many reservations) than with an ethical renovation, in the dislodging of the senses from modern epistemic regimes. Here, time and system are less of a factor than touch, communion, relationship: sympathy. The crux of the matter is to undo what Nancy Yousef, in *Isolated Cases*, calls epistemic limits that are in fact intersubjective limits, or an optics of finitude that disembodies the subject.

Arguably, this alternative modernity has become more, not less, relevant today. As bioinformatics insinuates itself into the most intimate areas of life, modern progress looks increasingly like the cold Urizenic mode of rational control that Blake called "consolidated error." Blake found hope in such a consolidation of the implications of modernity, because it makes alternative modernity more thinkable. As "error" grows ever more consolidated, in ways that strip "multispecies wellbeing" (Haraway) down to bioeconomic "bare life" (Foucault), one can lucidly see the benefits of becoming *more* romantic, or of romancing modernity.

Chapter 2 – Haptic Aesthetics: Wordsworth, Whitehead, and Speculative Feminism

1 The “stone” of science and the “shell” of poetry

To ground many of this study’s claims about romantic poetry’s haptic response to modernity’s isolating optics, I ask that the reader keep in mind Wordsworth’s contrast between the stone and the shell. The stone is a figure of normative empiricist isolated location, or "cognition," and the shell a figure of radical empiricist interrelation, or "prehension." Books, ironically, perform both of these functions, as “stones” that institute forms of cognition but also as “shells” that foster counter-cognition – an ambivalent potential of which both Wordsworth and Blake, I propose, were well aware.

Both poets habitually used the term “book” to characterize sections of their work. Yet Wordsworth was given to announce his distrust of books (in book form, naturally). Blake, more radically, lingers in many reader’s minds as the fiery blacksmith ceaselessly engaged in the energetic hammering out and recasting of the lines or lineaments of books, as if to release them, animate creatures, from dead to living form: books of illuminated poetry that defy generic conventions. His “memorable fancy” of “a Printing house in Hell” ironically reminds us that wisdom is a process of “mining” by which raw ores are transformed into “living metals,” only to be relegated again by men to the status of mere resource materials (or books):

I was in a Printing house in Hell & saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation.

In the first chamber was a Dragon-Man, clearing away the rubbish from a caves moth; within, a number of Dragons were hollowing the cave.

In the second chamber was a Viper folding round the rock & the cave, and others adorning it with gold, silver and precious stones.

In the third chamber was an Eagle with wings and feathers of air; he caused the inside of the cave to be infinite; around were numbers of Eagle like men, who built palaces in the immense cliffs.

In the fourth chamber were Lions of flaming fire raging around & melting the metals into living fluids.

In the fifth chamber were Unnam'd forms, which cast the metals into the expanse.

There they were reciev'd by Men who occupied the sixth chamber, and took the forms of books & were arranged in libraries. (MHH)

In this peculiar vision of infernal “printing” methods, Blake implies that knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation by a graduated process of dereification, moving from the dragon (for Blake, a symbol of the ego, covered in a thick armor of scale, or of the psychological consequences of materialism) to the illuminated Lion, or moving through the elements (earth, water, air, fire, space). Perhaps it is also implied that there are different grades of books: those that clear away rubbish from the cave of consciousness (Dragons); those that adorn consciousness (Vipers); those that cause consciousness to be infinite (Eagles); those that melt the “metals” of consciousness into “living fluids” (Lions); and those that “cast the metals into the expanse” (Unnam'd forms). These transformative metals or “living fluids” are, apparently, received by men who, ironically, perceive them as books and arrange them in libraries. I mention this “memorable fancy” because it seems to convey, in ways that bypass intellectual analysis, the romantic emphasis on poetry’s vitally counter-actualizing or dereifying potential. It also ironically conveys the fact that poetry is printed in the form of books, yet one more form of bondage of its “living fluids” or its “impossible” alternative modernity.

Yet Wordsworth, not Blake, is the subject for the moment, as I turn to *The Prelude*’s metaphors of stone and shell, to suggest that these figures clearly anticipate the constructivist distinction between optics and haptics. In particular, the figure of the stone (favored by Wordsworth and Whitehead) clarifies the distinction between an optics of isolated location (centered metaphysics) and a haptics of process-relation (speculative metaphysics).

This metaphor is presented in the dream of the Arab in Book Five of *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth associates the accumulated knowledge of science with Euclid's *Elements*, figured as a stone, and the highest achievements of verse with Milton's and Shakespeare's works, figured as a shell:

A lance he bore, and underneath one arm
A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell
Of a surpassing brightness.
'And this', said he,
'This other', pointing to the shell, 'this book
Is something of more worth.'

The passage values *both* stone and shell, or geometry and poetry, a fact clarified by Lee Johnson's observation in *Wordsworth's Metaphysical Verse* that geometry partakes in the ideal form that for Wordsworth is connected to the eternal aspect of poetry. Yet, if it points to the book of poetry as "something of more worth," the difference between the two is implied in the formal contrast between shell and stone. Both are organic figures, but the latter is closed while the former is open and "breathes."⁴¹ The shell is also formally analogous to the ear that listens to it. In that sense, the shell is a figure of intensive cognition and the stone a figure of extensive cognition. The openness of the shell, in contrast to the stone, and its association with melody or living patterns of meaning, lends it "more worth" as a figure of fluency or intensity, intimate with (if not indivisible from) attention and creativity.

A stone may seem to be a figure of concrete, particular fact, but for both Wordsworth and Whitehead, it is explicitly linked to abstract, geometrical, spatial modes of representation. For Whitehead, explicitly, the idea of the stone is *not* concrete, but abstract. Likewise, in a more Biblical register, Blake insistently registers "stone" as both perceptual and emotional "obstruction"

⁴¹ One might say that they are figures of "open" and "closed" metaphysics.

– an optics of the intellect that blocks the heart, or prevents the resurrection of more-than-human sympathetic feeling. Whitehead reminds his readers that strictly speaking for scientific materialism what is real about the stone is not its felt stoniness but its abstract status as spatial form. This is not to suggest that either Wordsworth or Whitehead denigrate mathematical logic. Both regard it as a high achievement. A problem arises only through the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (Whitehead): abstractions (isolated locations purged of movement or interrelation) are taken for metaphysical ultimates.

In this sense, the stone/shell contrast is a helpful metaphor for the contrasts Whitehead makes between dogmatic and speculative metaphysics, or for two modes of perception: presentational immediacy and causal efficacy. The stone and shell also express the contrast between optics and haptics. Where the stone is objectified by the eye, the shell, in its spiraling, resonant, involuted, and open shape is structurally analogous to the ear that listens to it. There is an undecidability between the listening ear (attention) and the shell as an organic form through which the movement of non-instrumental music passes.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, Keats and the second-generation romantics more radically take up the shell (or conch) as a metaphor for poetry, to replace the metaphor of the lyre used by Coleridge and Wordsworth. In doing so, Keats does not so much reject first generation ecopoetics as push it further from the model of natural objects, toward an intensive model of virtual ecology or process-relations. The question arises, again, of the extent to which poiesis (the shell, intensity, counter-cognition) implies either apocalyptic annihilation or perceptual renovation. This comes across vividly in Wordsworth's dream of the Arab in Book 5 of *The Prelude*, in which the dreamer puts the shell to his ear, only to hear, as Johnson suggests, a loud nonhuman blast that grows increasingly intelligible as a prophetic ode.

In Keats poems, such as the *Hyperion* poems and *Ode to the Nightingale*, the literary precursor of Wordsworth's shell, and the annihilation it prophesies, becomes an even more intense emblem of poetry as medicine – or as a mode of intensivity that undoes the ossifications and fragmentations (or disconnections) of cognition. The vital point is that poetry is etho-ecological/interrelational: its counter-cognitive song or vision transmits “a feeling for nature, as exhibiting entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presences of others” (SMW 84). The romantic trope of the nightingale suggests an unmediated expression of subjectless joy or extra-being: “In some melodious plot / Of beechen green, and shadows numberless, / Singest of summer in full-throated ease” (*Ode to a Nightingale* 7-10). Arguably, there is nothing elegiac in the nightingale’s singing, but there *is* something elegiac in the ode written to the nightingale. That is, as Keats tells us, the poet’s “heart aches” and his senses are “pained” by a “drowsy numbness” (*Ode to a Nightingale* 1-2) not out of envy of the bird’s effortless melopoiesis, but because in some sense a more-than-human intensivity presses upon the him – a sympathy that is too much for subjectivity, a deathless “happiness” that has never known sorrow because it is a kind of prepersonal “faery” ecstasy: “’Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, / But being too happy in thine happiness,-“ (9-10).

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

The nightingale, in a sense, is a hollow tube for intensivity, pouring abroad an interrelational ecstasy that is without self, singing without knowing that it is singing. But one of the points of Keats’s ode, of course, is that the human may enter into that more-than-atomistic mode, only to be jarred back into a “forlorn” mode of solitary selfhood. Indeed, the disappointed poet actually

accuses the event of poetic attention of being mere “fancy” or a “deceiving elf.” The timeless absorption in the beauty of the song is lost, and the poet is returned (shipwrecked)^{xiii} to time (isolated location, the “sole self”), as the haptic music (and perhaps the nightingale) recedes into the “next valley.”⁴² Famously, the poem ends with an undecidability about which is the waking state and which the dreaming state (arguably in ways that invert these categories, recalling Wordsworth’s hope to “rouse the sensual from their sleep / Of death”):

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep? (71-80)

In Keats as in Wordsworth, then, the elegiac impulse is linked, to the paradox of poetry as both spontaneous melody and as the material cultural trace of a sweetness (zoe) that modern consciousness (bios) wants to claim as its core but in fact excludes. The nightingale appears as a figure for poiesis as more-than-human intensivity in ceaseless trespass of punctual presence. To enter into that intensivity, as *Ode to a Nightingale* suggests, is to be “half in love with easeful Death” or to sense how “now more than ever seems it rich to die.” Keats figures this entry into poetic vision in terms of the effects of opium and wine, a relaxation of boundaries and an attenuation that approaches the vibrant threshold of the etho-ecological. As in Wordsworth, the

⁴² Johnson identifies in Wordsworth repeated and deliberate use of “golden sections” that conform to a “golden ratio” by which Wordsworth, and classical poets, metrically mapped out a movement from time to eternity and back again.

intensive mode of poetic attention charms away “the weariness, the fever, and the fret” (*Ode to a Nightingale* 23) of extensive and isolated experience.

In Wordsworth, likewise, the apparent threat of annihilation is ameliorated by an intimate association between “visionary power” and intensivity or etho-ecological experience. In imagining a certain kind of reader, who “With living Nature hath been intimate,” and thus participates in “Visionary power,” Wordsworth addresses himself to a people to come, a “we, who know.”^{xiv} This people to come embody an alternative modernity, a “commons,” for which power is not the ocular ability to collect personal data but a haptic sensitivity to visitations that approach the relaxed subject – etho-ecological affections evacuated from modern experience. Implicitly, the principle of the “living Presence” that, for Wordsworth, cannot be destroyed, is the principle of interrelation.

What, then, is for Wordsworth the imagined relationship of romantic poetry and this people to come? The hyperbolic apocalyptic imagery in Book Five can be read as a marker of the poet's anxiety about the foreclosure of intensivity (or of the affects of ecology), which great books, and works of nature, previously conspired to foster. It also registers anxiety about the “flood” of print media that spread modern “mindless” experience. In this sense, great books are fragile, temporal materializations of an inappropriable creative principle. As Book Five emphasizes from the outset, its subject is also a kind of apology for underemphasizing the formative power of books in the story of the growth of the poet's mind: “Great and benign, indeed, must be the power / Of living nature, which could thus so long / Detain me from the best of other guides” (166-169).^{xv}

Arguably, the threat to which Wordsworth responds is less that of an actual planetary apocalypse than of an apocalypse of deanimating print matter, which disseminates the optics of a finitude or the modern perception of an unsympathetic, unintelligible universe. In this respect, he

speaks of “an evil which these days have laid / Upon the children of the land,” referring to the modern utilitarian mode of education:

Rarely and with reluctance would I stoop
To transitory themes, yet I rejoice,
And, by these thoughts admonished, must speak out
Thanksgivings from my heart that I was reared
Safe from an evil which these days have laid
Upon the children of the land—a pest
That might have dried me up body and soul.
This verse is dedicate to Nature’s self
And things that teach as Nature teaches: then,
Oh, where had been the man, the poet where—
Where had we been we two, belove’d friend,
If we, in lieu of wandering as we did
Through heights and hollows and bye-spots of tales
Rich with indigenous produce, open ground
Of fancy, happy pastures ranged at will,
Had been attended, followed, watched, and noosed,
Each in his several melancholy walk,
Stringed like a poor man’s heifer at its feed,
Led through the lanes in forlorn servitude;
Or rather like a stalle’d ox shut out
From touch of growing grass, that may not taste
A flower till it have yielded up its sweets
A prelibation to the mower’s scythe.
(Book 5, 223-245)

Roughly a hundred lines later, just before the “boy of Winander” passage, Wordsworth explicitly links this mind-constricting evil to utilitarian bureaucrats (“watchful” modern “wardens”):

These mighty workmen of our later age
Who with a broad highway have overbridged
The froward chaos of futurity,
Tamed to their bidding—they who have the art
To manage books, and things, and make them work
Gently on infant minds as does the sun
Upon a flower—the tutors of our youth,
The guides, the wardens of our faculties
And stewards of our labour, watchful men
And skilful in the usury of time,
Sages, who in their prescience would controul
All accidents, and to the very road
Which they have fashioned would confine us down

Like engines—when will they be taught
That in the unreasoning progress of the world
A wiser spirit is at work for us,
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
Of blessings, and most studious of our good,
Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?

Arguably, Wordsworth is not only mocking modern educators (who “to the very road / Which they have fashioned would confine us down / Like engines”) but modern optics. In defending the “seed time” of apparent idleness or non-productivity, he anticipates an idea to which contemplative education today, supported by neuroscience, is slowly returning. He writes that in “what seem our most unfruitful hours,” a “better eye” is “at work for us... most prodigal / Of blessings, and most studious of our good.” That is, he affirms etho-ecological experience as the basis for an alternative modernity, even as he bemoans the “apocalypse” of the atrophy of modern experience – its deanimation, or its loss of more-than-human sympathy.^{xvi}

Reflecting on a living principle that outlasts not only culture and all of its frail productions, but the Earth itself, he adumbrates the dream-vision of Don Quixote, referring to his anxiety about the inevitable loss of the “consecrated works of bard and sage, / Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men, / Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes-”. A friend, responding to an expression of such fear, relates a dream that apparently emerged from “kindred hauntings.” The dream itself, he says, occurred under romantic circumstances, at noon, in a “rocky cave / By the seaside” while reading the “famous history of the errant knight,” a book that evoked in him a fear of a kind of engulfment by the sea of “poetry and geometric truth (The knowledge that endures)... / Exempt from all internal injury”:

...once upon a summer’s noon
While he was sitting in a rocky cave
By the seaside, perusing as it chanced,
The famous history of the errant knight
Recorded by Cervantes, these same thoughts

Came to him, and to height unusual rose
While listlessly he sate, and, having closed
The book, had turned his eyes towards the sea.
On poetry and geometric truth
(The knowledge that endures) upon these two,
And their high privilege of lasting life
Exempt from all internal injury,
He mused—upon these chiefly—and at length,
His senses yielding to the sultry air,
Sleep seized him and he passed into a dream.

A logic of association (it is a hot day, and he has been reading of Don Quixote, the armchair adventurer so nostalgic for an idealized past that he becomes a knight “errant” indeed) catalyzes a dream of being in a “wide wilderness,” terrifyingly alone:

He saw before him an Arabian waste,
A desert, and he fancied that himself
Was sitting there in the wide wilderness
Alone upon the sands.^{xvii}

He is relieved to discover a guide, in the form of a “lance”-bearing “Bedouin” on a camel:

...Distress of mind
Was growing in him when, behold, at once
To his great joy a man was at his side,
Upon a dromedary mounted high.
He seemed an arab of the Bedouin tribes;
A lance he bore, and underneath one arm
A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell
Of a surpassing brightness.

Referring to these mineral objects as “books,” the “guide” informs the “dreaming man” (82) that the stone is “Euclid’s Elements” while the conch is “of more worth”:

‘And this’, said he,
‘This other’, pointing to the shell, ‘this book
Is something of more worth.’ ‘And, at the word,
The stranger’, said my friend continuing,
‘Stretched forth the shell towards me, with command
That I should hold it to my ear. I did so
And heard that instant in an unknown tongue,
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,

A loud prophetic blast of harmony,
And ode in passion uttered, which foretold
Destruction to the children of the earth
By deluge now at hand... (88-99)

Why, one might ask, would the conch of interanimate, passionate poetry, if it is of more worth than the stone of abstract science, sound forth a prophetic ode foretelling the destruction of humanity? The Homeric yet biblical blast is "of harmony" and of "unknown" (yet inexplicably intelligible) "tongue." More than sound, it is language, but language of a kind that is full of "gods" and "winds" – at once biblically apocalyptic and yet consolingly pantheistic. Oddly, the act of hearing the song seems to have direct consequences, as if poetry, in communicating its meaning, communicates its loss:

...No sooner ceased
The song, but with calm look the arab said
That all was true, that it was even so
As had been spoken, and that he himself
Was going then to bury those two books—

The contrast between the two "books" hints at why the conch is of more worth than the stone. Poetry involves an interchange between the poet's and reader's mind – in that both are subtly led toward the same intensive mode of attention (or counter-cognition).⁴³ Wordsworth implies here a valorization of poetry, as effortless and familiar, and science, as willed and artificial, made explicit in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

The one that held acquaintance with the stars,
And wedded man to man by purest bond
Of nature, undisturbed by space or time;
Th' other that was a god, yea many gods,
Had voices more than all the winds, and was

⁴³ Where scientific language reifies, poetic song dereifies. There is an involitional inwardness to the conch, a dynamic spiraling, and yet an ambiguity about where its sound originates: is it in the (sympathetically formed) conch-like ear of the listener, or is it in the conch itself, or is it ever in between them?

A joy, a consolation, and a hope.’ (99-109)

The book of geometry might wed “man to man” across time and space, concerned with immutable intellectual laws, but the book of poetry speaks to the heart with the voice of etho-ecological interrelation.

Like the Arab-crusader,⁴⁴ the conch and what it speaks seems hybrid, both heathen and christian, both nonmodern and modern. Indeed, the thing the dreamer puts to his ear is *both* book and conch (both logos and poiesis):

My friend continued, ‘Strange as it may seem
I wondered not, although I plainly saw
The one to be a stone, th’ other a shell,
Nor doubted once but that they both were books,
Having a perfect faith in all that passed. (110-114)

The last image of the dream (or rather nightmare) – of the Arab riding away over desolate sands, hungrily pursued by inevitable waters – is one of terror. By implying that all of these images are suggested to the dreamer by waking circumstances (falling asleep at high noon while reading *Don Quixote* by the sea), Wordsworth cleverly works in a theory of the associative power of the imagination, linking outer to inner “tides.” At the same time, he harnesses this suggestive power.

The sea not only wells through the dreamer’s dream, but also through Book 5:

Beneath his arm—before me full in view—
I saw him riding o’er the desert sands
With the fleet waters of the drowning world
In chace of him; whereat I waked in terror,
And saw the sea before me, and the book
In which I had been reading at my side.’

The terror of this “drowning world” is curbed by the act of waking to the “actual” sea and “actual” book. That the book is *Don Quixote* hints, perhaps, at the lightness of the situation. Both *Don*

⁴⁴ “I fancied that he was the very knight / Whose tale Cervantes tells, yet not the knight, /But was an arab of the desert too, / Of these was neither, and was both at once...”

Quixote and *The Prelude* are in a sense about the quests of men who, at least in literary imagination, cling to an age that has been drowned. Wordsworth does not allow us to miss that comparison, conjuring the "semi-Quixote" as a personal mascot, and defending his apparent mania as the noble vocation of one who ("crazed / By love, and feeling, and internal thought") foregoes conventional life for a higher cause:

Full often, taking from the world of sleep
This arab phantom which my friend beheld,
This semi-Quixote, I to him have given
A substance, fancied him a living man—
A gentle dweller in the desert, crazed
By love, and feeling, and internal thought
Protracted among endless solitudes—
Have shaped him, in the oppression of his brain,
Wandering upon this quest and thus equipped.
And I have scarcely pitied him, have felt
A reverence for a being thus employed,
And thought that in the blind and awful lair
Of such a madness reason did lie couched.
Enow there are on earth to take in charge
Their wives, their children, and their virgin loves,
Or whatsoever else the heart holds dear—

More than that, Wordsworth strongly hints (though he couches it in conditionals such as "could") at a deeper parallel between himself and the Quixote figure, suggesting that he foresees a terrible change in the world (the "approach" of a "great overthrow") due to "gross" mass-industrial forms of mediation:

Enow to think of these—yea, will I say,
In sober contemplation of the approach
Of such great overthrow, made manifest
By certain evidence, that I methinks
Could share that maniac's anxiousness, could go
Upon like errand. Oftentimes at least
Me hath such deep entrancement half-possessed
When I have held a volume in my hand—
Poor earthly casket of immortal verse—
Shakespeare or Milton, labourers divine. (140-165)

This first-generation dream-vision will be important later in my discussion of second generation romantic dream-vision poems, and of the ways in which they respond to (and radically revise) Wordsworth. The conch image, in particular, figures in my reading of Keats.⁴⁵

Arguably, what is really desperate about the semi-Quixote figure, with whom Wordsworth identifies, is his “anxiousness” to preserve “immortal verse” (figured as a conch to highlight its counter-actualizing potential, or its intensivity) from a modernity that has already happened. In this sense, the “drowning” ocean represents less the threat of more-than-human sympathies to the modern mind than the loss of “deep entrancement” presented by the blind flood of modernity. Ironically, the conch itself (as an emblem of poetry) announces this flood to the modern ear, suggesting, with strange simultaneity, that poetry is vitally counter-actualizing (undoing all human things) *and* that human things (new forms of stimulating media) will be the undoing of the capacity for poetic attention. I hope to return later to this strange representation of poetry as the site of counter-actualization (deterritorialization, dereification, deconditioning), in reading the “figure all light” passage in Shelley’s *Triumph of Life*, arguably some of the most beautiful lines of verse ever written in the English language.

2 “A feeling for nature”

⁴⁵ I would note that this dream of the prophetic and ode-producing conch has implications for our understanding of Wordsworthian eulogy. The loss that he so frequently bemoans might be understood less as the loss of the old narratives of the “nature” of a British subject, than as the loss of such a counter-actualizing power.

“The literature of the nineteenth century, especially in English poetic literature, is a witness to the discord between the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechanism of science.” (SMW 87)

While it has become a commonplace of criticism to suspect the romantics of an overinflated, appropriative attitude toward nature, Whitehead emphasizes the emphatic *witness* they bear toward the “aesthetic values” of nature. He looks to the poets for a “philosophy of nature” that exceeds scientific materialism in its concern with “value,” “interfusion,” and what he calls “endurance”.⁴⁶

Both Shelley and Wordsworth emphatically bear witness that nature cannot be divorced from its aesthetic values; and that these values arise from the cumulation, in some sense, of the brooding presence of the whole on to its various parts. Thus we gain from the poets the doctrine that the philosophy of nature must concern itself at least with these six notions: change, value, eternal objects, endurance, organism, and interfusion.

Simple as these “six notions” may sound, they prove to be key players in Whitehead’s notoriously precise yet difficult philosophy. Stengers clarifies the way these terms work together in Whitehead’s “etho-ecology.” I quote here, en passant, from Chapter Ten of *Thinking with Whitehead*, “From the Concept of Nature to the Order of Nature,” in order to give a sense of how the very notion of etho-ecology emerges from an underlying model of *naturing nature*.⁴⁷

For the moment, eternal objects merely oblige us to resist the idea that sensation and intellection emerge the brain... Let us return, now, to the mountain that “endures.” Unlike eternal objects, which offer the temptation of a brutal continuity between the sense-objects of *The Concept of Nature* and the speculative scheme of *Process and Reality*, endurance constitutes a theme that is obviously new. The event had been that which passes. If an order of nature exists, it is because the event, henceforth understood as a unifying grasp, can also hold fast and endure through an environment that never ceases to change. And the poet’s emotion when faced by the millennial mountain must be heard. Endurance is not only a fact: it an accomplishment and achievement. It requires that the order of nature integrate what we are accustomed to thinking as paradigmatically human, that is, value. (TWW 156)

⁴⁶ Posthumanism, and dark ecology, may envision a restored intimacy with the inanimate, but it tends to do so in ways that continue to sever the aesthetic from metaphysics — dividing the “primary” stimuli of objectivity and “secondary” sense of subjectivity.

⁴⁷ For Bohm, a physicist influenced by Whitehead, an “implicate order” guarantees intrinsic value or meaning in the universe.

Stengers proceeds to quote a passage from *Science and the Modern World* that may remind us, strikingly, of Blake's insistence on minute particulars:

He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars.
General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, and flatterer;
For Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars,
And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power... (*J f.* 55, ll. 60–4)

Whitehead writes, in ways that seem to comment, humorously, on the value of the peculiar kind of obstinacy enacted by cultural agents like himself, and Blake, and Stengers:⁴⁸

“Value” is the word I use for the intrinsic reality of an event. Value is an element which permeates through and through the poetic view of nature... But there is no such thing as mere value. Value is the outcome of limitation... The salvation of reality is its obstinate, irreducible, matter-of-fact entities, which are limited to be no other than themselves. Neither science, nor art, nor creative action can tear itself away from obstinate, irreducible, limited facts. That which endures is limited, obstructive, intolerant, infecting its environment with its own aspects. But it is not self-sufficient. The aspects of all things enter into its very nature. It is only itself as drawing together into its own limitation the larger whole in which it finds itself. (SMW 93-4)

Stengers clarifies that “[t]o follow Whitehead... we must obviously free the term ‘value’ from any psychological connotation... Value belongs to the order of nature... what exists succeeds in enduring... Value indicates a success in and for itself... All that succeeds in enduring has succeeded in infecting its environment in a way that is compatible with this endurance” (TWW 157). One might say that Whitehead and Blake has succeeded, each in their own way, in infecting

⁴⁸And many conversèd on these things as they labour'd at the furrow,
Saying: 'It is better to prevent misery than to release from misery;
It is better to prevent error than to forgive the criminal.
Labour well the Minute Particulars: attend to the Little Ones;
And those who are in misery cannot remain so long,
If we do but our duty: labour well the teeming Earth...
He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars.
General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, and flatterer;
For Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars,
And not in generalizing Demonstrations of the Rational Power:
The Infinite alone resides in Definite and Determinate Identity.
Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falsehood continually,
On Circumcision, not on Virginity, O Reasoners of Albion!
(Jerusalem, f. 55, ll. 48–53, 60–6.)

the early twenty-first century. Here, Stengers offers the helpful comment that “‘Infection’ is the term Whitehead chooses to designate, in a generic way, what the poets celebrate as ‘presence’. Celebration refers to the fact that it is a poet’s experience that is infected by the mountain, gloomy and ancient” (157-8).

Stengers quickly moves to link these notions of endurance and infection with the etho-ecological notions of patience and trust. To do so, she turns links the images of Gaia and the mountain, the planet on which human beings have, taking the “risky wager” (163) of organisms, managed to find a “hold:” “The image of mountain-climbers is radicalized; they exist - that is, they endure - only insofar as the patience of what they define as a ‘hold’ is confirmed” (165). The “new figure of Gaia,” she posits, reminds us, urgently, that “the earth... [is] capable of assemblages that are very different from the ones on which we depend” (165). Here, in the context of this speculative feminist observation, she explains how ethos and ecology come together in Whitehead’s thought, in the mutualistic, relational notion of the etho-ecological “trust” by which an organism “explains itself in and on the basis of the patience on which it depends” (164):

In contemporary terms, we will say that endurance, value, clash, obstinacy, conflict, harmony, dependency, patience and impatience, and so on place the notion of the organism under the banner of an etho-ecology: the approach that tries to connect the *ethos*, or the way, constitutive of a living being, that such a being takes its environment into account, and the *oikos*, or the vaster totality to which it belongs, and more precisely the many links, niches, and collectivities produced by the *ethos* that mutually imply one another, and on which each depends in one way or another. An organism does not explain itself *qua* having succeeded in conquering a stable identity, bearing its titles of legitimacy, but it explains itself in and on the basis of the patience on which it depends, a patience presupposed by the value of which it is the achievement. The organism exhibits a “trust,” and this “trust” is etho-ecological, simultaneously a way of shaping that is always individual, limited, and obstinate, and a wager on an environment that confirms and nourishes it. (164)

Trust and patience are, of course, what one might normally call religious values (or, at the very least, secular ethics). Vitaly, Stengers distances these values from psychology, positing them, with

Whitehead, as nonpsychological and more-than-human — that is, as part of nature’s aesthetic ontology, or “ethico-aesthetic paradigm” (Guattari).⁴⁹

What Whitehead brings to light, like Deleuze and Guattari, is the extent to which modernity has broken this “trust.”⁵⁰ One might be put in mind of Wordsworth’s lines on the forgotten but still visitational “sympathies” between human and more-than-human forms of endurance:

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. (*The Excursion*, 1.481-491)

Insistently, he challenges the modern bar on etho-ecological sympathy or embodied attention to nature.⁵¹

In thus citing Wordsworth, the point which I wish to make is that we forget how strained and paradoxical is the view of nature which modern science imposes on our thoughts. Wordsworth, to the height of genius, expresses *the concrete facts of our apprehension*, facts which are distorted in the scientific analysis. Is it not possible that the standardised concepts of science are valid only within narrow limitations, perhaps too narrow for science itself? (SMW 84; emphasis added)

For Whitehead, both poetry and philosophy bear “testimony” to the interrelations that modernity excludes. The role of philosophy, in its broadest sense, is thus to hold intellectual abstractions accountable to the “concrete intuitions of the universe” (87). Poetry, like philosophy, “confronts

⁴⁹ What has been called Guattari’s “ethico-aesthetic paradigm.”

⁵⁰ What, in an epoch of anti-realism, Whitehead calls “world loyalty” and Deleuze calls “belief in the world.”

⁵¹ As noted, he praises the first book of *The Prelude*, “it would hardly be possible to express more clearly a feeling for nature, as exhibiting entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presences of others...” (SMW 84).

the sciences with concrete fact,” bearing “witness to the discord between the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechanism of science.” The endurance of poetry, he suggests, is “*evidence that [poets] express deep intuitions of mankind penetrating into what is universal in concrete fact.*”

In one of the most concise and lucid expressions of his central concerns,⁵² he writes:

Also, we must recollect the basis of our procedure. I hold that philosophy is the critic of abstractions. Its function is the double one, first of harmonising them by assigning to them their right relative status as abstractions, and secondly of completing them by direct comparison with more concrete intuitions of the universe, and thereby promoting the formation of more complete schemes of thought. *It is in respect to this comparison that the testimony of great poets is of such importance. Their survival is evidence that they express deep intuitions of mankind penetrating into what is universal in concrete fact.* Philosophy is not one among the sciences with its own little scheme of abstractions which it works away at perfecting and improving. It is the survey of the sciences, with the special object of their harmony, and their completion. It brings to this task, not only the evidence of the separate sciences, but also its own appeal to concrete experience. It confronts the sciences with concrete fact... *The literature of the nineteenth century, especially in English poetic literature, is a witness to the discord between the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechanism of science.* (SMW 87; emphasis added)

One of the most remarkable figures, in romantic poetry, for “the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechanism of science” is, as I have discussed, the stone and shell of Wordsworth’s dream of the Arab, in Book V of the *The Prelude*. This vital passage, with its double vision of time and eternity, involves an implied marriage of geometry (the stone) and poetry (the shell).

Lee Johnson has demonstrated that Wordsworth was more than a little bit deliberate in encoding this marriage, in plain sight, directly into the metrical *form* of his poetry. In crucial passages of his verse, Wordsworth literally enacts this marriage of science and art in a metrical “golden section” — a relationship of verse sections in which “the smaller part (a) is to the larger (b) as the larger (b) is to the whole (a + b) - a:b: :b:a +b” (Johnson 11) — that expresses “the great ratio of eternity to time” (Johnson 91). Johnson speculates that the recurrent use of golden sections (consciously composed in accordance with the “golden ratio” of sacred geometry) expresses

⁵² And in which, like Wordsworth, he expresses the complementary relation of geometry and poetry.

Wordsworth's aspiration to "bury eternal principles in the 'poor earthly casket' of a book" (94). Perhaps even more importantly, this recurrent symbolic gesture implies Wordsworth's wish to re-wed reason and passion:

...the geometrical faith of both the scientist and the poet unites them in a common pursuit. Just as geometry represents the 'purest bound / Of reason,' so poetry has the power to 'exhilarate... and to soothe... the heart of human kind.' Once again, we find an instance of Wordsworth's characteristic union of intellect and instinct - reason and passion - and his refusal to separate the two or to exclude one for the sake of the other. (90)

The intimate relationship between geometry and poetry for Wordsworth, Johnson proposes, echoes a dynamics of incarnation, as if geometry (timeless or virtual potential) is to poetry (embodied and perishable expression) as form is to nature:

The occasion of the dream [of the Arab] apparently reflects Wordsworth's general notion that spiritual truths by themselves have no utility unless they are incarnated and that incarnated truths should take on outward forms as lasting as possible. It is unlikely that he would have held geometry in such high esteem, after all, if he had been unable to link its principles with those of nature. Geometry that resisted incarnation would have been for him, as it almost was for his Wanderer, 'a wasting power' (*Excursion*, I, 265). (Johnson 85)

Here, it seems worth noting that Johnson's reading of Wordsworth's "metaphysical verse" (or the "spousal verse" by which he labors to re-wed reason and passion) may seem old-fashioned in a knowing intellectual atmosphere perhaps insufficiently aware of its investment in the "materialism with which, since the seventeenth century, science has saddled philosophy" (SMW 36).

Whitehead, in this regard, may hereafter help romanticists bear more keenly in mind the need for literary criticism to "be vigilant in critically revising [its] modes of abstraction" (SMW 59). One example of this slight negligence in literary criticism is, for instance, the tendency to read sensation, in romantic texts from *The Prelude* to *Frankenstein*, as stimulation,^{xviii} in keeping with a materialism that views the haptic less as interrelation than as "a continuous succession of

instantaneous material configurations” (TWW 130).⁵³ In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead bluntly addresses this modern proscription of intensivity in the name of extensivity:

The aboriginal stuff, or material, from which a materialistic philosophy starts is incapable of evolution.... Evolution, on the materialistic theory, is reduced to being another word for the description of the changes in the external relations between portions of matter... There can be merely change, purposeless and unprogressive. But the whole point of the modern doctrine is the evolution of the complex organisms from antecedent states of less complex organisms. The doctrine thus cries aloud for a conception of the organism as fundamental for nature. (SMW 107)

As Stengers points out, in a discussion of the “holy war” against final causes in modern biology — for which Darwinian selection is speciously taken to explain evolution on the circular reasoning that it “acts as a barrier against the irrationality of final causes” (Stengers 126) — Whitehead “did not have to deal with the poverty of contemporary propositions, but he knew that in any case selective explanation was doomed to substitute one and the same monotonous, ‘epicyclic’ answer (in this case, ‘adaptionist’) for the multiple questions that arise for those who study living beings” (129). In brief, Whitehead announces “the crying need for another starting point” (129), or “some new doctrine of organism,” not only in physics and biology, but across every field of thought: “The field is now open for the introduction of some new doctrine of organism which may take the place of the materialism with which, since the seventeenth century, science has saddled philosophy... Such a displacement of scientific materialism, if it ever takes place, cannot fail to have important consequences in every field of thought” (SMW 26).

Stengers makes the vital point that Whitehead’s philosophy of organism (in its speculative rather than dogmatic metaphysics) “has no ambition to provide a unifying point of view” such as materialists (working from “the vision of the world described as a continuous succession of instantaneous material configurations”) have demonstrated:

⁵³ Whitehead criticizes this digital view for its “radical inconsistency.... which asserts that physical causation is supreme, and which disjoins the physical cause from the final end” (SMW 76).

It is important to emphasize once again that Whitehead does not envisage any “theory” enabling the definition of both the (quantic) vibratory organism and of the living organism. His proposition has no ambition to provide a unifying point of view, as was successively proposed by the notions of energy, system, or information. The organism does not designate a possible object of knowledge, it does not constitute an answer around which the sciences would converge, but it is rather, as we shall see, what should oblige us to think about the divergence of questions as a reflection of the “living values” that constitute the order of nature. . . . It is thus not a unifying vision of the world that is proposed with the organism, but what Whitehead designates as a new mode of abstraction, capable of reconciling science and philosophy.

Here, she cites a passage from *Science and the Modern World* concerning the relationship between philosophy, critical thought, and science that would seem to clarify the relationship between the stone and shell in the dream-vision presented by Wordsworth. Simply put, the stone (extensivity) is a prerequisite for thought, but it must itself be constantly subjected to sympoiesis, or to reorganization via intensivity:

You cannot think without abstractions; accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to be vigilant in critically revising your modes of abstraction. It is here that philosophy finds its niche as essential to the healthy progress of society. It is the critic of abstractions. A civilisation which cannot burst through its current abstractions is doomed to sterility after a very limited period of progress. An active school of philosophy is quite as important for the locomotion of ideas, as is an active school of railway engineers for the locomotion of fuel. (SMW 59)

What Whitehead says of philosophy – that its intensivity is necessary to the “health” of society – might be said of poetry, to a more radically prepersonal degree: its intensivity, like that of dreaming, is necessary to the health (the trust and patience) of the brain and organism. After all, it is only in intensivity that fragmentations and reifications dissolve. This would be to redefine “health” in terms of “the living ideal of aesthetic harmony” (TWW 128) that Stengers describes as the center of Whitehead’s “notion of organism” (128). Put differently, this would be to associate well-being with an incipient drive of the organism toward etho-ecological intensivity, or to prehensions of felt interrelationship/experiential meaning. Stengers implies that for Whitehead events of attention, in which the brain is both highly still and highly active, “may lead not to

arbitrariness, but to harmony” (128). At heart of this question of health lies, then, the question of whether extra-being is a threatening alterity (arbitrariness) or tender interrelation (harmony). Put otherwise, is to attend to extra-being to be mad or sane?⁵⁴

3 Wordsworth’s Material Sympathies: “A form of flesh and blood”

“If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarised 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 house of man.” William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*

A constructivist model of aesthetic ontology may prompt us to rethink the increasingly influential idea that romantic aesthetics was inspired by the romantic sciences. Critics such as Denise Gigante, Alan Richardson and Marjorie Levinson, attribute to romantic life sciences a major influence *on* romantic poetry, as if romantic poetry’s new aesthetic models were directly inspired by new scientific theories of biological generativity. Gigante’s *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism*, for instance, argues that romantic life sciences advanced new models of epigenetic or self-organizing form, for which form itself was monstrously transgressive of its own limits.

Whitehead’s thought suggests, instead, that where romantic sciences tended to present the vitality of nature in terms of its alterity (*natura naturata*), romantic poetry expressed a feeling for nature in terms of tenderness or relation (*natura naturans*). In that sense, romantic poetry never internalized modern secular materialism’s “doctrine of secondary qualities” (Whitehead). Even

⁵⁴ For a further exploration of this question, see my discussion of extra-being in Blake and Dickinson.

when, in *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead intimates that Wordsworth felt more impatient toward science than the science-minded Shelley, he depicts Wordsworth neither as a reactionary boor nor an irrational emotionalist, but as a poet less excited than Shelley by the chemical potential of poetry and poetic potentials of chemistry. He describes Wordsworth as a “thoughtful, well-read man with philosophical interests and sane even to the point of prosiness” who felt that the “important facts of nature elude the scientific method” (SMW 83).

Hinting at the ecological affinities between his own philosophy of organism and Wordsworth’s nature poetry, Whitehead writes that Wordsworth refuses to “hand over inorganic matter to the mercy of science” and to privilege “the living organism” but, rather, “grasps the whole of nature as involved in the tonality of the particular instance” (83). He *does* figure Shelley as more science-friendly than Wordsworth, proposing that the younger poet “never tired of expressing in poetry that thoughts which [science] suggests” (84). The hills, he notes, were “a chemical laboratory” to Shelley. He points, too, to the geometric design that guides the imagery of *Prometheus Unbound*, describing science as a “part of the main structure of [Shelley’s] mind, permeating his poetry through and through” (84).⁵⁵ Yet, crucially, he emphasizes the deeper refusal to bifurcate and deanimate nature (and the implicit critique of “scientific doctrine”) that joins the two poets:

Now the poet, so sympathetic to science, so absorbed in its ideas, can make simply nothing of the doctrine of secondary qualities which is fundamental to its concepts. Shelley’s nature is in its essence a nature of organisms, functioning with the full content of our perceptual experience. We are so used to ignoring the implication of scientific doctrine, that it is difficult to make evident the criticism upon it which is thereby implied. If anyone could have treated it seriously, Shelley would have done so... Furthermore Shelley is entirely at one with Wordsworth as to the interfusing of the Presence of nature. (85)

⁵⁵ Lee Johnson’s *Wordsworth’s Metaphysical Verse* clarifies the extent to which Wordsworth was likewise concerned with geometric design.

Steeped as he was in science, *absorbed* in its ideas, Shelley's poetry (Whitehead proposes) never separates its scientific interest in processual nature from the "full content of our perceptual experience." By implication, to confine science to the perspective that lived experience adds "secondary qualities" or merely "psychic additions" to the world of fact is to impose an abstract "scientific doctrine" that runs against the grain of concrete reality. To dismiss the ontology of the aesthetic is to betray the concreteness to which science appears to be dedicated. But this is perhaps not so much the fault of science as it is the fault of modern optics, or of Enlightenment thinkers and their tacit faith in the distanced, disembodied, or autonomous observer. By contrast, a philosophy of organism understands science in a romantic mode compatible with naturphilosophie.

Against the traditional reading of Shelley as a subjective idealist, Whitehead reads him through the lens of his own "organic realism." Referring to lines from *Mount Blanc*, Whitehead comments, "Shelley has written these lines with explicit reference to some form of idealism, Kantian or Berkeleyan or Platonic. But however you construe him, he is here *an emphatic witness to prehensive unification as constituting the very being of nature*" (86; emphasis added).⁵⁶ In other words, for Whitehead, Shelley's idealism actually inverts Kant, if not Plato, bearing poetic witness to lived aesthetic intuitions of a thoroughly interrelational universe. This suggests that the romantic poets may not have adopted an epigenetic notion of form from romantic era sciences so much as expressed an intuition of the deep compatibility between science and poetry, discoverable in a nonmodern model of aesthetic ontology. Vital form, as Gigante's reading itself helps clarify, is aesthetic rather than naturalistic; it implies the intensity of *natura naturans*.

⁵⁶ Blake's margin comment on Berkeley: "God is not a Mathematical Diagram" (*On Berkeley*).

4 Aesthetic linkages: pleasure, sympathy, relationship

All 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 through all conditions hath a power
To consecrate, if we have eyes to see...
...I felt that the array
Of outward circumstance and visible form
Is to the pleasure of the human mind
What passion makes of it, that meanwhile the forms
Of Nature have a passion in themselves
That intermingles with those works of man
To which she summons him...
(*The Prelude* Book 12 278 – 292)

“It is the task of ethologists, and all those who live in attentive contact with animals, to question, specify, and enrich what animals make us feel and think. It is the job of the scientific communities to test the relevance of the problematic definitions that make them work. But it belongs to speculative thought to fight against the impoverishment of experience, particularly against its confiscation by the great theoretical debates that oppose mankind, ‘endowed with consciousness’, to all others supposedly deprived of it.” (Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead* 26).

Wordsworth’s romantic reservations about science seem rather more a deferral than an outright rejection. Someday in the future, Wordsworth allows (as if anticipating the post-classical turn) science may intensify rather than disrupt our aesthetic experience of beauty and relation, or our feeling for nature, and if, and when, that day comes, science will move closer to poetry, or at least be aided by the efforts of poets.

To introduce the relevant passage from the Preface to *Lyric Ballads*, it is necessary to consider several key points that it raises about the aesthetic links between pleasure, sympathy, relationship, imagination, love, and the living “universe.” While these might seem to be synonyms,

they trace a chain of linkages between body, affect, and prehensive interrelations. Importantly, as suggested by its famous formulation of pleasure as elementary or as inherent to material processes – “the grand elementary principle pleasure by which we live” – the passage expresses an aesthetic ontology that subverts the epistemic bias of modernity.⁵⁷

But are all pleasures the same? From the outset, one must bear in mind that some pleasures ring false for Wordsworth, while others ring true. Some are elevating, others degrading. His preface specifies that it is the ethical role of the poet to promote an elevated sense of *elementary* pleasure, as a “defence of human nature” against new forms of pleasure (newspapers, novels) that excite the mind through “the application of gross and violent stimulants.” He calls the “endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability... one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged,” and then describes why “this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day.” Although the passage is extremely well known, I examine it at length because it puts Wordsworth’s efforts to enlarge pleasure and sympathy in the explicit context of an “[endeavor] to counteract” what he sees as “the evil” of a rising tide of brute stimulations, via mass media.

Here, Wordsworth figures the upheavals of the 1790s as the effects of “mobile” or “contagious” passions (Pinch, Bewell, Burgess), which bear the semblance of progress and revolution (coinciding with rapid urbanization and political revolt) but, as Wordsworth presents them, are desensitizing, reducing the range of human feeling, contracting rather than expanding the sense of interrelationship.⁵⁸ In short, Wordsworth expresses an anxiety that forms of “gross”

⁵⁷ In 1802, as Alan Richardson has noted, Wordsworth was still very much an experimental thinker “in the midst of one of the most daring intellectual ventures of his era; the reinvention, along naturalistic, physiological, and ecological lines, of the study of human nature” (Richardson 67).

⁵⁸ Wordsworth describes himself as having been infected by new intellectual ideas during his year in France, at the outbreak of the revolution. That is, he claims to know firsthand the ethical and emotional limitations of progressive secularism. The question remains whether he merely assumes a poet’s reflective distance from an increasingly uncomfortable political immediacy, given the growing autocratic intolerance for dissidence in England, and the outbreak of fanaticism in France.

stimulation are deadening the modern body to “certain inherent and indestructible qualities” or “powers” in the body and in things.

Here, substituting the word “affect” for “powers,” and contrasting affects with stimulations, may clarify his meaning. Affects, in contrast to stimulations, are deconditioning. Stimulations impinge on the senses, producing excitations, and, in turn, addictions or cravings. Affects, on the contrary, are only felt in the relaxation of addictive efforts to know or grasp. By inference, stimulations strengthen the discursive center, or the addiction to discursive activity. Affects, by contrast, are felt in the relaxation of the discursive center, or in receptivity and sensitive attention. The key point is that the affectivity of an interrelational universe is *not* felt by modern subjects, reinforced in their discursive centers. Hence, the informational overstimulation of modern subjects curbs etho-ecological experience. Habituated to gross and extensive excitations, the embodied mind loses its sensitivity to the quieter, subtler, and more tender influence of etho-ecological intensivity. In brief, Wordsworth makes a vital distinction between stimulation (the atomistic modern *optics* of bare matter, or *natura naturata*) and affect (a nonmodern *haptics* of process-relation, or *natura naturans*).

This becomes clear when one considers Wordsworth’s assertion that the “purpose” or subject of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* is “to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature,” and that this subject (which might seem quotidian) “is indeed important!” This prolonged attention to affection is important, specifically, because it departs from the empiricist emphasis on “particular facts” and implies, instead, that “*the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants*” (emphasis added). Wordsworth’s intention is to make a simple but extremely elusive point: that quietness and silence actually imply a highly active and sensitive mode of attention – or, if one likes, an

extraordinarily alert mind. Here, the mind is active not because it is formulating ideas and images, but because it has become more-than-ordinarily responsive to affects or felt etho-ecological interrelations. That Wordsworth considers this “more than usual organic sensibility” (PLB) a prerequisite for poetic composition reflects the idea that the rhythms and associations of poetry begin in sensitive reception of more-than-human “powers” or interrelations. To attend to the world is to be composed by the world.

Nowhere does Wordsworth explicitly either posit an idealist philosophy of human access or isolate human consciousness as an exception. Nowhere does he narrowly imply that the “fluxes and refluxes of the mind” are either exclusively human or merely subjective. Likewise, the phrase, “the great and simple affections of our nature” leaves open the question of where “our nature” begins and ends; the possessive phrase “our nature” may suggest narrow human appropriation, or it may refer more widely to etho-ecological affections that flow through us. Marjorie Levinson notes her own revised understanding of the Wordsworthian “and” (as in the phrase “a motion and a spirit”) as the marker of a shift in modes rather than a reiteration; “motion” and “spirit” are not synonyms but two registers of a single event. Personally, I would emphasize the primacy of intensivity in Wordsworth’s witness to “affections of our nature” – a phrase that points to “prehensive unification as constituting the very being of nature” (SMW 86).

Wordsworth’s basic meaning seems clear enough: media stimulations in an increasingly automated and monotonous world dull sensitivity to difference and relation. The modern subject is constituted by techniques of micropower, addicted to an abstract, discursive mode of perception, increasingly opaque to (quieter but more active) affective attention:

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. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in

cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse. When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it; and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonorable 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*; and did I not further add to this impression a belief, that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success. (emphasis added)

Wordsworth is clearly unfriendly to sensationalist mass media or “low” culture (the “general evil” of “rapid communication,” “frantic novels” and “extravagant stories”). This may seem to place him on the side of reflection (sensibility, sympathy) against stimulation (passion, enthusiasm), but his stance is more complex than a simple high/low opposition. Instead, he offers a radical empiricist middle path between the enlightenment divides of sensation (brute stimuli, passions) and reflection (refined feeling). I would argue that his supposed attitude of reflective distance actually radically extends the meaning of sympathy in etho-ecological (and perambulatory) ways that literate arm-chair elites might have found far too intimate. The crucial difference between Wordsworth and, for instance, Adam Smith, is that Wordsworth promotes less a normative aesthetics than a radical aesthetics. His sensations and pleasures are, emphatically, *not* private.

For Wordsworth, pleasure in its finer sense (joy, which exceeds identity) involves affection and interrelation. Pleasure acts as an antidote to “gross and violent stimulants” in the sense that it involves a shift from extensive cognition to intensive prehension – a shift from ethics-free consumption to etho-ecological attention, or from conventional preconception to deconditioning attention. On these grounds, he defends the pleasures of poetry as “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.”⁵⁹ Again, “the grand elementary principle of pleasure” implies an extended, more-than-human model of nature. Our sympathies (or our ability to feel our way into things) are, he suggests, “produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure.” This is true, he argues, even of the “Anatomist,” whose knowledge is painfully acquired, because such knowledge, too, is a form of familiarity. In brief, he claims a special status for pleasure as a mode of intensity (influxes that carry “an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure”) or sympathy.

In contrast to the “Man of Science” (and the eighteenth-century empiricist), the Poet attends to the world in its experiential intensity:

To this knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which without any other discipline than that of our daily life we are fitted to take delight, the Poet principally directs his attention... *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.* 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.* (emphasis added)

This boldly postsecular passage announces the poet’s unshakeable faith in, and direct experience of, a shared etho-ecological dimension: a “natural and unalienable inheritance” that “connects us

⁵⁹ The etho-ecological, postsecular dimension of this “principle of pleasure” is notable in a Wordsworth passage from a 1798 manuscript fragment:

There is an active principle alive in all things;
In all things, in all natures, in the flowers
And in the trees, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
The moving water and the invisible air.
All beings have their properties which spread
Beyond themselves, a power by which they make
Some other being conscious of their life.

with our fellow-beings” via “habitual and direct sympathy,” a lived intuition of the “presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion.” Inverting Plato, Wordsworth situates the poet as the most beneficial of social beings, binding knowledge and passion together in ways that are virtuous not because transcendent or ideal but because etho-ecological. Wordsworth seems to defer to futurity the potential of science to bring about the revolution in human relationship that, one might infer, it failed to bring about in the utopian 1790s:^{xix}

He is the rock of defence of human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying every where with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. (PLB)

5 Fluency – Whitehead and Wordsworth

“...the history of philosophy... tends to ignore the fluency, and to analyse the world in terms of static categories” (PR 209)⁶⁰

For a better grasp of how and why Whitehead admired Wordsworth, one can look to Matthew Segall’s essay “The Poetry of Philosophy: Wordsworth’s Poetic Vision of Nature in Light of Whitehead’s Cosmological Scheme.” Though Segall offers a Whiteheadian reading of Wordsworth, his primary aim is to “translate” Whitehead’s “philosophical scheme back into the... visitations expressed in Wordsworth’s verse”: “...so much of what Whitehead labored to give clear

⁶⁰ In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead pauses to reflect on the history of philosophy as the history of competing efforts to present “the metaphysics of ‘substance’” and “the metaphysics of ‘flux’” (PR 208). He writes, “*The elucidation of meaning involved in the phrase 'all things flow' is one chief task of metaphysics....*” (208; emphasis added).

conceptual expression to in his own work was originally awakened in him by the feeling for the universe that vibrates off the pages of Wordsworth's poetry." Segall offers a lucid explanation of Whitehead's regard for "Wordsworth's emphatic witness to the fact that "nature cannot be divorced from its aesthetic":

Wordsworth is perhaps the most esteemed nature poet in the history of the English language. For Whitehead, he is the chief exemplar of the Romantic reaction against the abstract mechanistic picture of nature fostered by the scientific materialism of the 17th and 18th centuries. He cites the famous line, "We murder to dissect" with qualified approval, agreeing with Wordsworth that "the important facts of nature elude the scientific method" – even while he, a mathematical physicist as well as a philosopher, believes the specialized abstractions of natural science need not necessarily leave nature lifeless. *Science can and should be reformed*. Mechanistic science of the sort championed by the likes of Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and Laplace commits the fatal sin of bifurcating nature, *isolating its objective mathematizable aspects by peeling away its sensual and moral layers, layers which found their home in a soul now entirely sealed off from the outside world*. Concerning the ethereal hues of a sunset, the sweet fragrance of a primrose, or the melodies of a thrush the poets are all mistaken: from the point of view of scientific materialism, nature is "a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly." *Contrary to the general thrust of natural science since its birth in the 17th century, Whitehead's cosmological scheme is an attempt to systematize Wordsworth's emphatic witness to the fact that "nature cannot be divorced from its aesthetic values, and that these values arise from the culmination... of the brooding presence of the whole on to its various parts."* In the jargon of his metaphysics, Whitehead saw in Wordsworth's poetry "a feeling for nature as exhibiting entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presences of others." Hidden within this one short cryptic sentence are the major categories animating Whitehead's entire cosmological system, including "actual occasions," "eternal objects," "internal relations," and "concrecence." (Segall; emphasis added)

If "the major categories animating Whitehead's entire cosmological system" are "hidden" in this "one short cryptic sentence" about Wordsworth's "feeling for nature," this implies in turn that Wordsworth's nature poetry expresses a species of embodied philosophy that cannot be reduced to idealism.⁶¹

⁶¹ This is important because, as Karl Kroeber argues in *Ecological Literary Criticism*, literary critics of the early 1970s (Abrams, Bloom, Hartman) challenged the traditional reading of the British Romantics as nature poets, reading them instead as primarily concerned with mind, imagination, or vision. New Historicists (Levinson, McGann) confirmed this reading, but in ways that associated the visionary element of romanticism with aesthetic ideology. Kroeber and Bate's eco-criticism attempted to restore the

Yet for New Historicists, and later eco-critics such as Morton, romantic poetry is thoroughly disembodied in the sense that it displaces concrete, particular reality for aesthetic fantasy. So the question at hand is the legitimacy of Whitehead's turn to Wordsworth as the poet of a genuinely embodied philosophy. Even-handedly, Segall considers this problem, observing that Wordsworth, though prone to Kantian transcendental idealism (for which thought is a priori), was "infected" more by Schelling's Naturphilosophie (for which nature is a priori):

Wordsworth's absorption in living nature – "an inmate of this active universe," as he put it – all but inoculated him against this subjectivist over-reaction; but there are a few occasions when Wordsworth seems almost to become infected by other strains of the Romantic bloodstream, especially those emerging in the orbit of Kant's transcendental idealism. Whitehead strongly positioned himself in opposition to Kantian, Fichtean, and Hegelian forms of idealism which can be read as attempting to derive the concrete and contingent existence of the universe from the abstract universal categories of thought. Not incidentally (considering the influence of Schelling on Wordsworth through the intermediary of Coleridge), the relationship of Whitehead's philosophy of organism to Schelling's Naturphilosophie is far more congenial, since unlike for Kant and Hegel, for Schelling "Nature is a priori."

The question of how far Wordsworth was actually willing to go in his world loyalty (or the model of "feeling intellect" advanced as an alternative to "independent intellect" in Book XI of *The Prelude*) is complicated by what Segall describes as Wordsworth's tacitly atomistic notion that "the senses must be free to half-create and half-perceive the world" over and against a Whiteheadian "object-to-subject vector of experience." Like Noel Jackson, Segall registers the wavering in Wordsworth between an emphasis on the imaginative element and affective element in perception – or the proposition that, in Whitehead's words, "[The subject] is not productive of the ordered world, but derivative from it."

Asking whether "Whitehead's object-to-subject account of the formation of experience may seem too strict a rule for Wordsworth's imaginative epistemology to obey," Segall comments that

romantics to view as nature poets, but, as I have discussed, later eco-critics such as Morton and Hutchings have in turn read this attempted reassessment as itself naïve and reactionary.

“[t]his reversal of the vector of experience may at times prove to be a true tension in the two men’s outlooks.” Yet Segall sharply points to the ways in which Wordsworth seems to immediately moderate idealism with materialism:

It would be a superficial reading of Wordsworth to ignore the degree to which he wavers in his assigning of precedence to either the mental or physical poles of experiential reality. Just a line below his statement in Tintern Abbey about the creative element in perception, he writes of being “well pleased to recognize / 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.” He finds that his mind is not only necessarily tied to his sensual encounters with nature (as it is for Kant), but that the language of sense has birthed and raised to maturity even the purest of his ideas from out of the womb of nature herself.

Levinson, likewise, has pointed out that Wordsworth sometimes uses “and” (“a motion and a spirit”) less to imply dualism, and less to subtly subordinate one idea to another, than to show that the event has two registers, *naturata* and *naturans*, extensivity and intensivity, bare motion and felt interrelation. On that reading, “nature and the language of the sense” need not imply a divide between objectivity and subjectivity; the language of the sense might be read, instead, as a sympoietic intensivity of things that, in turn, gives rise to language, the (Condillacian) roots of which are poetry (rhythm, feeling, music).⁶² That is, “the language of the sense” may point to an etho-ecological intensivity located neither in nature nor in the mind (both of which are abstractions). On similar lines, Segall proposes “a deeper commonality” beneath this tension between Whitehead’s “object-to-subject account” and Wordsworth’s “wavering” stance:

Elsewhere, Wordsworth writes of the way a mountain range “By influence habitual to the mind /...shapes / The measure and the prospect of the soul.” Further conforming to Whitehead’s object-to-subject reading of the vector of experience, he writes: “From nature doth emotion come, and moods /...are nature’s gift.” But it could still be asked: is Wordsworth speaking here in a psychological or in an ontological register?

⁶² In *Wordsworth and the Art of Philosophical Travel*, Mark Offord, noting that lack of evidence that Wordsworth read Condillac, speculates that he and Coleridge would have felt the influence of his ideas.

Segall takes the position that, for Whitehead at least, Wordsworth is “an ontologically committed panpsychist”:

Whitehead’s characterization of Wordsworth’s poetry as exhibiting a sensitivity to the interpenetrating “prehensive unities” of nature, “each suffused with modal presences of others,” is meant to classify him as an ontologically committed panpsychist. His poetry is overflowing with hymns to the Anima Mundi, with references to the “the Life / of the great whole,” and to the way “every natural form, rock, fruit or flower /... Lay bedded in a quickening soul”...

Arguably, Wordsworth does tend to speak in an ontological register, in ways that ground experience in embodied interrelation or in a panexperiential universe. Yet Wordsworth also emphasizes, like Blake and Coleridge, that the etho-ecological intensity of imagination is both within and without.

6 Wordsworth’s Posthumanism: A Future “Material Revolution”

Unavoidably, urgently, an uncomfortable question arises. Is reading Wordsworth even relevant today, except as a quaint vestige of an older, more self-assured form of cultural hegemony? Ought we, as Timothy Morton suggests in *Ecology without Nature*, to finally abandon the romantic image of nature for a less humanizing and more bracing ecological thinking. Is it time for a “dark ecology” that dispenses with relationality even as it highlights both radical intimacy and radical alterity? Speculative feminists, such as Braidotti and Haraway, would seem, to an extent, to be dark ecologists, except that, in contrast to Morton’s speculative realism, and its ties to object-oriented-ontology, they emphasize an aesthetic ontology or speculative metaphysics

drawn from constructivist philosophers such as Deleuze and Whitehead. Where Morton's poststructuralist aesthetics emphasizes the weirdness and wildness of information, which traverses all traditional humanist divides (life/nonlife, organic/inorganic, animate/inanimate, subjectivity/objectivity), constructivist aesthetics remains interested, "romantically," in the "immanence" of "a Life" (Deleuze).⁶³

Perhaps the most telling sign of Morton's difference with a constructivist thinker like Brian Massumi is the conspicuous absence, in Morton's writing, of the term affect. For Morton, affective aesthetics is a passing academic fashion, a fad for oozing, sticky relationism and vitalism. My own bet, in this study, is less on Morton's dark ecology^{xx} and object-oriented-ontology⁶⁴ (with its dogmatic Aristotelian metaphysics) than on Stengers's etho-ecology and on speculative metaphysics. Both dark ecology and etho-ecology (or integral ecology) emphasize the urgent fact that the global ecological crisis has ruptured the traditional models of nature, and both embrace the intrusivity of what used to be called nature.⁶⁵ The difference is that Morton (following New Historicists such as McGann) challenges the aesthetic as a reflective means of humanizing experience, or a means of fostering consciousness only of that which is pleasurable to the bourgeois mind, and thus of displacing from consciousness all painful and ugly realities. Kevis Goodman, in *Georgic Modernity*, takes a similar view, arguing that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the "philosophical" and reflective eye of the poet was expected to master the sensations that impinged through the "microscopic" eye. Such mastery lay at the heart of aesthetic pleasure.

⁶³ Morton might be said to take the "hard" and sciency (or critical) view, while constructivists take the "soft" and humanistic (or speculative) view.

⁶⁴ Also known, for problematic reasons, as "speculative realism," though its Aristotelian notion of isolated substance runs counter to Whitehead's "provisional" or "organic" realism.

⁶⁵ Wordsworth's nonmodern model of the aesthetic, in which to attend to the world is to be composed by the world, is grounded in etho-ecological attention, and in the speculative metaphysics, that modern epistemic regimes bar. Romantic haptics may, thus, begin to look less and less (and modern optics, more and more) like a political fantasy.

Yet, Goodman adds that Wordsworth unsettled the philosophical with the microscopic, or the optic with the haptic, introducing “affective dissonance” into otherwise pleasurable aesthetic works. Affect, for Goodman, is the trace or register of historical immediacy (the actual violence of social relations) in works that otherwise create mastering reflective distance, deferring immediacy along “pleasant byways.” One can infer that for both Goodman and Morton affect is properly understood as the material particularity that disrupts aesthetic narratives. In *Blake, Deleuzian Aesthetics, and the Digital*, Claire Colebrook marshals a similar argument, construing the haptic as the discrete and digital, which disrupts centered subjectivity or narrative pleasure.

In contrast to both Morton and Goodman, constructivists (particularly Massumi) treat affect as haptic in a different sense – a speculative metaphysical sense more in accord with late Deleuze and late Whitehead. Here, what constitutes the haptic is its quality of touch or relation, its affectivity. From a constructivist perspective, it makes little sense to reduce affect to bare sensation (stimulation), which is simply to capture affect in the Lockean sensation-reflection binary. If one follows the Lockean (and Aristotelian) logic, then aesthetics is reflective and affect is sensational.⁶⁶ Affect, thus construed, cannot imply sympathy or etho-ecology. A rift is opened between the pleasurable sense of beauty and meaning (reflectively provided by human cognition) and merely material stimulations. Put differently, if by affect one means relation, feeling, emotion, then all affect is provided, in the Lockean model, by human consciousness as a “psychic addition” (Locke, Whitehead). In this study, I have employed the term critical materialism to describe this modern

⁶⁶ Tracing the sensationalist doctrine to “Aristotle’s dictum, “A substance is not present in a subject,” Whitehead proposes instead that “an actual entity *is* present in other actual entities” and “every actual entity is present in every other actual entity” (PR 50). This seems a precise formulation of the difference between empiricism and radical empiricism, the latter of which, if Whitehead can be trusted, involves a more loyal continuation of Darwin’s naturalistic project. “[A]ctual entities,” for Whitehead, “are drops of experience, complex and interdependent” (18), each of which exhibits “significance for itself” (PR 25), but infects and is infected by the “extensive continuum.”

tendency to associate affect with stimulation and stimulation with the haptic. Such a tendency conflates the haptic with the optic, I propose. I have therefore employed the term speculative materialism to describe a counter-tendency to associate affect with sympathy or etho-ecological feeling, and to associate etho-ecological feeling with the haptic. What becomes clear, I hope, is that the critical materialism and speculative materialism are grounded in competing epistemic, and metaphysical, assumptions. A lack of precision about these competing assumptions has led, I submit, to the predominance of critical materialist attitudes in the discussion of affect, haptics, and aesthetics in romantic studies.

The present study is an extended attempt to reconsider the etho-ecological modernity presented in British Romantic poetry. One of the heresies of romanticism, after all, is that it presents the relationship of nature to mind as fluid, easy, porous, and not-baffling. Shelley and Coleridge, who were, by all evidence, more interested in science, and more influenced by German naturphilosophie, than Wordsworth, envisaged a science without secondary qualities and without bifurcation, a science that is post-secular in that it does not stop itself, artificially, under “the influence of theory” (CN 30). Coleridge called Spinoza “that god-intoxicated man.” Shelley’s view of matter was more-than-atomistic: “To speak of matter as ‘inert’, Percy Shelley claims, makes no sense: ‘It is infinitely active and subtle’” (Gilmore 477).

To romance modernity, then, is to affirm a “firmer trust” (Wordsworth), “belief in the world” (Deleuze), or “world-loyalty” (Whitehead). That one *expects* this of romantic poets is precisely the problem in attempting to read this trust in reality as anything but dreamy and quaint. With Morton one might ask, *why would* modernity, in its anti-lyrical, hard-headed approach to reality require a return to the lyrical? One plausible reply is that the doctrine of self-interest, in its lack of an etho-

ecological or interrelational model of the commons, lies at the cold and narrow core of ecocidal modernity.

7 Whiteheadian postmodernism: Shaviro's philosophical fantasy

“[Affect] is not confined to the image or idea; it is of another nature, being purely transitive, and not indicative or representative, since it is experienced in a lived duration that involves the difference between two states” (*Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* 49).

One way of answering the question of what aesthetic ontology can add to modern awareness is to consider Steven Shaviro's argument about the impact of Heidegger on twentieth-century critical thought. Shaviro's *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* begins with a conceit: what if the twentieth century had been the century of Whitehead rather than Heidegger? Arguably, the main thrust of this speculative question (which aligns Kant, Whitehead, and Deleuze in surprising ways) is toward an understanding of subjectivity-as-becoming – an aesthetic ontology that shifts the emphasis away from the critique of the subject toward a belief or trust in the world as prehensive or affective.

What if instead of focusing its intellectual energies on questioning the metaphysics of presence, the twentieth centuries had, with Whitehead, taken metaphysics as given?

What if Whitehead, instead of Heidegger, had set the agenda for postmodern thought? What would philosophy be like today? What different questions might we be asking? What different perspectives might we be viewing the world from... The parallels between Heidegger and Whitehead are striking. *Being and Time* was published in 1927, *Process and Reality* in 1929. Two enormous philosophy books, almost exact contemporaries. Both

books respond magisterially to the situation (I'd rather not say the crisis) of modernity, the immensity of scientific and technological change, the dissolution of old certainties, the increasingly fast pace of life, the massive reorganizations that followed the horrors of World War I. Both books take for granted the inexistence of foundations, not even fixating on them as missing, but simply going on without concern over their absence. Both books are antiessentialist and antipositivist, both of them are actively engaged in working out new ways to think, new ways to do philosophy, new ways to exercise the faculty of wonder. And yet how different these two books are: in concepts, in method, in affect, and in spirit. (WC viii)

Shaviro compares Heidegger and Whitehead's relative concerns (1) with "Being" (the past) versus "Becoming" (the novel), (2) with pinning down what went wrong in the history of philosophy versus "twist[ing] this history in wonderfully ungainly ways," (3) with an avoidance of metaphysics versus a speculative metaphysics that "makes metaphysics speak what it has usually denied and rejected," (4) with a preoccupation with "Language" versus an awareness of "the inadequacy of reducing philosophy to the interrogation and analysis of language," (5) with a baroque, enigmatic writing style versus one that is "neutral" or "dry, gray, and abstract" yet "reignit[es] the philosophic sense of wonder at every step," (6) with a distrust of technology versus an awareness that we "only get into trouble when we extend these abstractions beyond their limits," (7) and with a "critique of the subject" versus a lighter understanding of "subjectivity as embedded in the world" – an undoing of "the ontological privilege of being human" for which the "critique of the subject need not be so compulsive a focus of philosophical inquiry" (vii-xii).

With this list of comparative perspectives between what one might loosely term poststructuralism and constructivism, Shaviro strikes the major points of critical debate after the affective turn, and after the publication of works such as Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* and Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual*. These points not only serve as an incisive introduction to Whitehead, but as an argument for the alternative modernity that might emerge from integral modes of thought. Like speculative feminists (Braidotti, Haraway, Stengers), Shaviro

affirms aesthetic subjectivity, noting (in ways that echo Eve Sedgwick and Rosi Braidotti) that its critique has been pursued doctrinally, in ways that denigrate embodied experience. Shaviro makes these stakes clear in presenting his work as “an experiment... an attempt to rethink ‘postmodern’ theory, and especially the theory of aesthetics, from a point of view that harkens back to Whitehead instead of Heidegger” (xiii). He affirms “speculation” and “fabulation” as an alternative to academic hair-splitting:

If Whitehead were to replace Heidegger as the inspiration of postmodern thought, our intellectual landscape would look quite different... Whitehead both exemplifies, and encourages, the virtues of speculation, fabulation, and invention. These may be opposed both to the dogmatism of humanistic or positivistic certitudes and to the endless disavowals, splitting of hairs, and one-upmanship that has characterized so much recent academic “theory.” (xii)

At heart, Shaviro turns to Whitehead for a theory of aesthetics that is more affirmative and less suspicious. He turns from a hermeneutics of suspicion, for which aesthetics equals ideology (the fantasy medium of a false consciousness that conceals actual relations), towards an etho-ecological aesthetics. Both approaches can be (and have been) approached to Wordsworth, but it seems that, at this current moment of ecological doom, when the stuffy study of poetry seems rather irrelevant, there is in my opinion much more transformative potential in recognizing that aesthetics does more than shield egoistic and self-interested forms of consciousness. Aesthetics opens consciousness to nonconscious or more-than-private flows of sympathy. In a chapter of *Science and the Modern World* entitled “The Romantic Reaction,” Whitehead writes of how “the brooding presence of the hills” haunts Wordsworth, who “always grasps the whole of nature as involved in the tonality of the particular instance.”

That said, I rather suspect that Shaviro might strongly prefer Blake to Wordsworth, perhaps agreeing with Keats's cheeky remarks⁶⁷ in a letter to his fellow poet John Hamilton Reynolds:

It may be said that we ought to read our contemporaries, that Wordsworth, etc., should have their due from us. But, for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist? Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself. Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing. Sancho will invent a Journey heavenward as well as anybody. We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself — but with its subject... I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur and Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not be teased with grandeur and merit when we can have them uncontaminated and unobtrusive. Let us have the old Poets and Robin Hood.

Keats, Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, Hampstead, February 3, 1818.

Wary of Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime" and of his "palpable design on us,"⁶⁸ not all readers may share Whitehead's view that Wordsworth's poetry is "pervaded by this sense of the haunting presences of nature," or that "it would hardly be possible to express more clearly a feeling for

⁶⁷ These remarks seem to anticipate the opening to *The Fall of Hyperion*, which Keats wrote later that year.

⁶⁸ Keats's irreverence for Wordsworth is perhaps partly explained by the famous response to a young Keats's trembling recitation of the Hymn to Pan from *Endymion* in Benjamin Haydon's home in 1817. Haydon wrote later that:

I have a letter of Keats wherein he expresses the most glorious respect & love of Wordsworth, and expresses the highest turmoil of pleasure at my sending the first sonnet he addressed me to Wordsworth --

When Wordsworth came to Town, I brought Keats to him, by his Wordsworth's desire -- Keats expressed to me as we walked to Queen Anne St. East where Mr. Monkhouse lodged, the greatest, the purest, the most unalloyed pleasure at the prospect. Wordsworth received him kindly, & after a few minutes, Wordsworth asked him what he had been lately doing, I said he has just finished an exquisite ode to Pan -- and as he had not a copy I begged Keats to repeat it -- which he did in his usual half chant, (most touching) walking up & down the room -- when he had done I felt really, as if I had heard a young Apollo -- Wordsworth drily said

"a Very pretty piece of Paganism" --

This was unfeeling, & unworthy of his high Genius to a young Whorshipper like Keats -- & Keats felt it deeply -- so that if Keats has said any thing severe about our Friend; it was because he was wounded -- and though he dined with Wordsworth after at my table -- he never forgave him.

nature, as exhibiting entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presences of others,” or that “Wordsworth, to the height of genius, expresses the concrete facts of our apprehension, facts which are distorted in the scientific analysis” (SMW). One might fault both Wordsworth and Whitehead for being philosophers, engaged in persuading us that they had, in nature, found the cure to the myth of separation. But, for me at least, the crux of these matters is the question, and the life, of intensivity, which Shaviro seems to wish, via Whitehead (and Deleuze), to return to our intellectual landscape. Whitehead clearly found this intensivity in Wordsworth. Much of the rest of this study will, at least incidentally, point to Blake and Keats as perhaps more reliable instruments of intensivity than Wordsworth.

8 Kicking out the Mind: Whitehead’s “reformed subjectivist principle”

“Philosophy is the product of wonder. The effort after the general characterization of the world around us is the romance of human thought. The correct statement seems so easy, so obvious, and yet it is always eluding us.” (Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, Lecture Seven: Nature Lifeless)

“What is it to obey nature? What is it to be an empiricist?” asks philosopher and sociologist of science Isabelle Stengers. For Stengers, at the moment it is not possible to pretend to a “truly empirical science. “Essentially, in asking this question, she draws a contrast between radical empiricism and normative empiricism. Like Whitehead, she questions whether the traditional empiricist actually displaces the material reality to which they purport to be faithful. This is one

of the questions that a student of romantic poetry must ask. What does it mean, in Wordsworth's terms, to be "a lover of nature?"

In *The Concept of Nature*, Whitehead describes the forefathers of empiricism, and their modern successors, as "dragging in... the mind" as "a way of shirking the problem of natural philosophy." He points out that primary substance, in Hume, is reconsidered in terms of perceptions, and all perceptions or "knowable facts" found to be "qualities of a subject." Experience is radically divorced from *res vera*. Hume is less a radical empiricist than an extreme subjectivist or mediationalist, whose epistemology centers on the private mind and its perceptions: "The impressions of sensation which collectively form this entirely private experience 'arise in the soul from unknown causes'" (PR 257).

Developing a "reformed" subjectivism, Whitehead argues that objective reality is actually denied (as Berkeley noticed early) by Descartes and Locke, who "conceive the physical world as in essential independence of the mental world" (PR 326). Ironically, "exact measurements" too would happen in the private mind, essentially un-sharable and barren: "All exact measurements are, on this theory, observations in such private psychological fields" (327).⁶⁹

Whitehead writes, "*You will remember that I have already stated that the key to the problem lies in the notion of simple location. Berkeley, in effect, criticizes this notion. He also raises the question, What do we mean by things being realised in the world of nature?*" (67; emphasis added).

⁶⁹ Pinpointing the crux of the problem, he comments that Descartes and Locke "abandon the 'realitas objectiva' so far as *sensa* are concerned (but for Descartes, cf. Meditation, 'it is certain all the same that the colours of which this is composed are necessarily real'), and hope to save it so far as extensive relations are concerned" (327). Again, if objective reality is to be abandoned with respect to the senses, for Whitehead this implies the disembodied Humean notion that "the impressions of sensation which collectively form this entirely private experience 'arise in the soul from unknown causes'" (326). Nature is never "realized." This "impossible compromise," he notes, was "easily swept aside by Berkeley and Hume" (327).

He agrees with Berkeley that the modern doctrine leads "to an entirely incoherent philosophy of perception in so far as it restricts itself to the ultimate datum of material in time and space" but (as Ernest Wolf-Gazo points out) instead of adopting an idealist stance, he abandons the notion of "perceptual knowledge" for the more radical notion of "prehension."⁷⁰ He coined the term prehension to avoid the traditional "attempt to catch nature without its passage" and to eschew traditional models of system or serial "connectivity": the "kind of theory in which nature is conceived simply as a complex of one kind of interrelated elements such as either persistent things, or events, or sense-data" (*An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge* 14-15).⁷¹

Without going too deeply into Whitehead's alternative account of vector transmissions of feeling clothed in the *sensa*, and of their realization in interrelational "drops of experience," it is enough to note that he seeks to restore the linkage between the (subjective) *sensa* and (objective) *res verae*. He argues that *sensa* function "as forms participating in the vector prehensions of one occasion by another" and suggests that "*the whole story is comprised within the account of the*

⁷⁰ Perceptual knowledge in itself is not the problem, so much as its modern connotations. For Whitehead, perceptual knowledge "is always a knowledge of the relationship of the percipient event to something else in nature" or "direct knowledge of the percipient event as having its very being in the formation of its natural relations" (PNK 14). Despite his optimistic notion of perception, as participant in relations "in the making" (the "passage" or "creative advance" of nature), he found the term "perception" to be "shot through with the notion of cognitive apprehension" (SMW 69).

⁷¹ Mediationism (even in complex systems theory and in models of connectivity) implies a theory of nature that does not attribute realized existence *to* nature. To illustrate this, Whitehead introduces the Humean problem of color perception, which followed to its logical conclusions, proves that the exact measurements of science occur entirely within the abstraction of a disembodied mind:

The modern doctrine of 'private psychological fields' is the logical result of Hume's doctrine, though it is a result which Hume 'as an agent' refused to accept. This modern doctrine raises a great difficulty in the interpretation of modern science. For all exact observation is made in these private psychological fields. It is then no use talking about instruments and laboratories and physical energy. What is really being observed are narrow bands of colour-sensa in the private psychological space of colour-vision. The impressions of sensation which collectively form this entirely private experience 'arise in the soul from unknown causes'. The spectroscope is a myth, the radiant energy is a myth, the observer's eye is a myth, the observer's brain is a myth, and the observer's record of his experiment on a sheet of paper is a myth. (PR 326)

subjective concrescence of res verae” (PR 167; emphasis added). In Whitehead’s terms, the *sensa* are indivisible from *res verae*; they are not subjective additions to a world of inert matter, but an affective element of a felt event.⁷² The felt dimension of an event cannot be subtracted or explained away. Process philosophy thus rejects modern materialism’s tacit metaphysics of “vacuous actuality” (atoms in the vacuum):

The difficulties of all schools of modern philosophy lie in the fact that, having accepted the subjectivist principle, they continue to use philosophical categories derived from another point of view. These categories are not wrong, but they deal with abstractions unsuitable for metaphysical use... The notions of the 'green leaf and of the 'round ball' are at the base of traditional metaphysics. They have generated two misconceptions: one is the concept of vacuous actuality, void of subjective experience; and the other is the concept of quality inherent in substance. (PR 167)

To summarize, Whitehead rejects not the subjectivist principle but its constriction to private cognition.^{xxi} His “reformed subjectivist principle” is inextricable from his “ontological principle,” summarized in his aesthetic ontological view that “*Process is the becoming of experience.*”⁷³

⁷² Again, one may consider the role of the *res vera* in Whitehead’s reformed subjectivism, or his aesthetic ontology of “becoming”:

The reformed subjectivist principle adopted by the philosophy of organism is merely an alternative statement of the principle of relativity... that it belongs to the nature of a “being that it is a potential for every ‘becoming’”... This principle states that the being of a *res vera* is constituted by its ‘becoming’. *The way in which one actual entity is qualified by other actual entities is the 'experience' of the actual world enjoyed by that actual entity, as subject.* The subjectivist principle is that the whole universe consists of elements disclosed in the analysis of the experiences of subjects. *Process is the becoming of experience. It follows that the philosophy of organism entirely accepts the subjectivist bias of modern philosophy.* It also accepts Hume's doctrine that nothing is to be received into the philosophical scheme which is not discoverable as an element in subjective experience. This is the *ontological principle*... (PR 166; emphasis added)

⁷³ As Stengers brings out in *Thinking with Whitehead*, modern thought seems to miss the “wager” of organisms, or what one might call the adventurous “becoming” (the intuitive “footholds” or prehensions) of “experience.” In romantic terms, connectivity sees *natura naturata* but is blind to *natura naturans*. For Whitehead, as for sociologists of science and political ecologists, what’s at stake is the postsecular task of challenging “the moderns” who have undermined the “wager” of many species.

9 Magic and Cosmopolitics: the scandals of 21st Century speculation

“I would propose that we need to forfeit this protection in order to relieve ourselves of the sad, monotonous little critical or reflexive voice whispering that we should not accept being mystified, a voice that relays that of the inquisitors. This voice may tell us about the frightening possibilities that would follow if we gave up critique, the only defense we have against fanaticism and the rule of illusions. But it is first of all the voice of the epic story that still inhabits us. ‘Thou shall not regress!’” (Stengers, *Reclaiming Animism*)

“No one has ever been modern. Modernity has never begun. There has never been a modern world.” (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 47)

“Hume noted for all time that Berkeley's arguments did not admit the slightest refutation nor did they cause the slightest conviction. This dictum is entirely correct in its application to the earth, but entirely false in Tlön.” (Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”)

Why waste time with intellectual curlicues? The crux of the matter is etho-ecological attention, and the limits set upon sensitive attention by “inert ideas” (Whitehead).^{xxii} Or, as Stengers implies, the danger lies in our tendency to “relay” the voice “of the inquisitors,” or to denigrate, as mystic or romantic, attention that trespasses these limits. When Latour writes, as a sociologist of science, that we have never been modern, he explicitly means that we need not be so surprised at the disruption of the modern contract (a contract *not* to see interrelations). If tentacular nature-culture hybrids (like global warming) have intruded back into view, then, Latour assures us, we moderns are the ones that have encouraged them to proliferate.

As modern readers of romantic poetry, we might therefore take a less puritanical attitude toward romanticism's “metaphysical junk” (Levinson) – such as Wordsworth's “interfusion” or Blake's “infinite in all things.” In linking Stengers's “etho-ecology” to Wordsworth's “feeling

intellect,” I would argue that this junk metaphysics has been ethically and politically relevant – *highly* so! One need only consider Blake’s “intellectual vision” of how “A robin redbreast in a cage / Puts all heaven in a rage” (*Auguries of Innocence*) or of how “the Chimney-sweepers cry / Every blackning Church appalls” (*London*). Such a vision scandalously trespasses into etho-ecological sympathy. Blake’s mottos of the haptic (or infernal proverbs) – such as “If a thing loves, it is infinite” (*Annotations to Swedenborg*) – not only challenge the puzzled reader to see his own habits of Urizenic perception but to recognize the violence implicit in those habits.

Blake’s poetry – more graphic, satirical, and allegorical than Wordsworth’s – permits a visceral and holistic grasp of the problem, and “history,” of modern optics.⁷⁴ Blake is also more explicitly concerned with the “dark psychological consequences” (Quinney) of empiricism. Various Blake scholars (notably, Otto, Makdisi, Lussier, Hutchings, and Leslie) have offered lucid accounts of Blake’s basic strategies of disrupting perception, provoking unsettling awareness of the violence of modern optics. Kevin Hutchings, in *Imagining Nature*, brings forward an aspect of Blake that seems particularly pertinent now: his refusal to de-anthropomorphize or deanimate the natural universe.^{xxiii}

Yet, because animation and vitality can also be conceived in terms of systems, networks, and information flows – and *have* been conceived this way by literary scholars (Levinson, Jackson, Gilmore, Morton, and others) attempting to explain the affects of romanticism via the technological revolution – I find it important to point out that these network models often reinforce critical materialist skepticism about both etho-ecological attention. Simply to speak of “assemblages” (as both Latour and Stengers have observed) may continue to shield us from

⁷⁴ Critical materialism does not do enough, I would argue, to challenge the most troubling aspect of modern optics: its cold and rational power over life (i.e., its authority to position some as less agented than others).

“experiencing the existential consequences of our questions” and permit us to ponder “connections... without feeling our intentional stance threatened”:

Relating animism to the efficacy of “assemblages” is a dangerous move, however, because it may well reassure us a bit too easily. It is part of our fabrication as readers, to feel free to ponder without experiencing the existential consequences of our questions. For instance, we may be tempted to understand assemblages as an interesting concept among others, pondering its connections with other concepts—that is, *without feeling our intentional stance threatened by its demand*. And also without fearing the suspicious gaze of the inquisitors, without feeling the smoke in our nostrils. We are protected by the references we quote. (Stengers, “Reclaiming Animism”)

Stengers provocatively endorses reviving “compromised words” such as “magic,” arguably because such words do pose a post-secular threat to the modern intentional stance. To use the word magic, at least, is to take an intellectual and professional risk:

This is why it may be better to revive more compromised words, which have been restricted to metaphoric use only. “Magic” is such a word, as we freely speak of the magic of an event, of a landscape, of a musical moment. Protected by the metaphor, we may then express the experience of an agency that does not belong to us even if it includes us, but an “us” as it is lured into feeling.

I would propose that we need to forfeit this protection in order to relieve ourselves of the sad, monotonous little critical or reflexive voice whispering that we should not accept being mystified, a voice that relays that of the inquisitors. This voice may tell us about the frightening possibilities that would follow if we gave up critique, the only defense we have against fanaticism and the rule of illusions. But it is first of all the voice of the epic story that still inhabits us. “Thou shall not regress!” (“Reclaiming Animism”)^{xxiv}

This internalized voice of the inquisitors, I would repeat, is founded on the tacit modern bar on metaphysics. As I will explore, it is the gothic modern optics of “life-in-death” – the “voice of the grave” or “voice of sorrow... from the hollow pit” in Blake’s *Book of Thel*, with its vision of a “little curb of flesh on the bed of our desire.”⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Blake’s epic-length illuminated manuscripts, and his constantly evolving non-linear mythopoiesis, dramatize the peculiar situation of the “moderns” (Latour). His lifework is devoted to fostering, for inhabitants of modernity (or “Ulro”), the ability to shift modes of perception and read the mirror writing (the haptics hidden by egoic perception). In that sense, it is not that Blake restores religious fantasies,

"In the eyes of our critics the ozone hole above our heads, the moral law in our hearts, the autonomous texts, may each be of interest, but only separately. That a delicate shuttle should have woven together the heavens, industry, texts, souls, and moral law — this remains uncanny, unthinkable, unseemly"

(Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 5).

"The myth system associated with the Anthropos is a setup, and the stories end badly. More to the point, they end in double death; they are not about ongoingness. It is hard to tell a good story with such a bad actor. Bad actors need a story, but not the whole story."

(Haraway, "Tentacular Thinking")

"They began to weave curtains of darkness
They erected large pillars round the Void
With golden hooks fastend in the pillars
With infinite labour the Eternals
A woof wove, and called it Science"

(Blake, *The Book of Urizen*, V, Plate 19)

Chapter 3 "Earth's Answer": Etho-ecology and Haptic Aesthetics in Blake

1 "Earth's Answer" & the "Occurrent Arts"

Lest one think that British Romantic poetry identifies itself with the "voice of the Bard," and lest one think the business of that bardic voice is to redeem fallen nature, rescuing it from abjection and restoring it to agency or animation, it behooves one to consider William Blake's little poem, "Earth's Answer," which follows directly, and offers a response to, the

such as the gnostic belief that human beings are plunged into a fallen (or inherently "evil") world of matter, but rather that he questions the psychological fantasies for which bare matter exists in the first place. The Urizenic plunge into materialism, after all, isolates the mind in a universe of death, sacrificing a world of relations to psychotic power.

“voice of the Bard” in the “Introduction” to *Songs of Experience*. Given that *Songs of Experience* mirrors *Songs of Innocence*, and that the two form a complementary whole, “Earth’s Answer” also stands in contrast to the “Introduction” and opening poem (“The Shepherd”) of *Songs of Innocence*.

Significantly, both pairs of poems involve acts of call and response bound up with poetic composition. In the lighter (but in many ways no less tragic) *Songs of Innocence*, the poet is a wandering being whose heart is filled with the animate beauty of the world, which bubbles forth as song; he is called to commit his happy songs to paper by children, or by the potential delight his songs may bring them. In the grimmer *Songs of Experience*, the poet (as “Bard”) speaks less *from* nature than *to* nature, compelling it to return from its darkness. In short, in *Innocence* the impetus for poetic composition is the willingness of the pastoral songster to express the call of a relational universe to relational beings. In *Experience*, the impetus for poetic composition is the authority of the Bard, who has heard the “Holy Word,” to call a fallen, impure, irrational domain of feeling back into the light of truth. Crucially, Earth does actually answer this priestly Bard, so that the *Songs of Experience*, too, become instances of speech emerging from the side of the more-than-human. No matter how bardic *Songs of Experience* may seem, this more-than-human excess is always bursting through its compositions. One might even say the the real author of *Songs of Experience* is this speaking back of the more-than-human to the anthropocentric medium of writing. In *Innocence* the etho-ecological world of interrelations is, interestingly, something that springs into human feeling through all the many voices of nature, while in *Experience* it is the voice of a wilderness that speaks back to the human institutions from which it has been set outside.^{xxv}

To better understand the difference between the pastoral and bardic mode of these two

interdependent series of poems (a difference, arguably, that hinges on the ways in which official discursive acts set bars on etho-ecological feeling), it may help to briefly summarize the introductions to and opening poems of *Innocence* and *Experience*.

In the “Introduction” to *Songs of Innocence*, a merry piper encounters a laughing child “on a cloud,” who asks him to pipe a song “about a Lamb!” The child asks him first to pipe it again, weeping to hear it, then asks him to drop his pipe and sing “thy songs of happy cheer.” This, too, makes the child weep with joy.⁷⁶ The child enjoins him, “Piper, sit thee down and write / In a book, that all may read,” then vanishes. The lines that follow offer an odd origin story for *The Songs of Innocence* (as a non-priestly mode of poetic composition):

So he vanish'd from my sight;
And I pluck'd a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.⁷⁷

One might interpret, and summarize, this origin story by saying that Blake casts the poetic mode of this first group of “innocent” compositions as a spontaneous piping that moves to more deliberate song, meant for an immediate audience, and is then deliberately recorded for all to read. Notably, he figures even his writing instrument as a “hollow reed” or “rural pen,” as if it is simply

⁷⁶ It is difficult to say if it is actually the same song about a lamb, though the piper says, “So I sang the same again, / While he wept with joy to hear.”

⁷⁷ INTRODUCTION Piping down the valleys wild, Piping songs of pleasant glee, On a cloud I saw a child, And he laughing said to me: “Pipe a song about a Lamb!” So I piped with merry cheer. “Piper, pipe that song again;” So I piped: he wept to hear. “Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe; Sing thy songs of happy cheer:!” So I sang the same again, While he wept with joy to hear. “Piper, sit thee down and write In a book, that all may read.” So he vanish'd from my sight; And I pluck'd a hollow reed, And I made a rural pen, And I stain'd the water clear, And I wrote my happy songs Every child may joy to hear. THE SHEPHERD How sweet is the Shepherd's sweet lot! From the morn to the evening he stays; He shall follow his sheep all the day, And his tongue shall be filled with praise. For he hears the lambs' innocent call, And he hears the ewes' tender reply; He is watching while they are in peace, For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.

nature that is writing through him. More inscrutably, he says he “stain’d the water clear.” Taken literally, this could mean, paradoxically, that he made the water clear by staining it clear. While this meaning may seem unlikely, it does convey the idea that writing, even with the best intentions, is a marking or staining. The reader, anyway, is more likely to infer that he “stain’d” the clear water – with the ink from his improvised rural reed pen. Yet, even then, it is difficult to tell the location of this water. Could the “water clear” be a symbol for the innocent soul, that is given happiness by poems but that is also stained by their emotional content? (After all, the Christian story of the lamb is one that makes one “weep with joy” because the lamb submits to its own sacrifice out of a love that does not die). The “staining” of the “water clear,” for those who have paid enough attention to the book’s title (which mentions both innocence and experience), may already shadow forth the theme of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* – that the fallen world will imprint itself on the initially joyous and loving soul.

Is he perhaps writing *in* water? Logic, of course, rejects attributing such a sense to the lines. A more concrete reading might highlight the fluids that go into the “solid” act of writing. Yet, still, how can children “hear” these “happy songs” if they are written on paper, and why is there no mention of the paper?

And I stain’d the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.

The poem that follows, “The Shepherd,” extends the initial figures of a natural man who lives in sweetness amid innocent creatures. It also extends the Christian undertones, as the shepherd here is not simply the one who leads the sheep but who listens all day to the love song of things: he “hears” the “lambs’ innocent call” and the “ewes’ tender reply.” In that sense, his song of “praise” is a response to a more-than-human call.

Contrast this opening to *Songs of Innocence* with the opening of *Songs of Experience*, an introduction that begins with the pompous “voice of the Bard” and with a first song, “Earth’s Answer,” that painfully exposes the Bard’s presumed human domination over all things.

Hear the voice of the Bard,
Who present, past, and future, sees;
Whose ears have heard The Holy Word
That walked among the ancient tree...

An ambiguity is immediately introduced, such that it is difficult to decide whose voice called to the “lapsed soul,” the Bard’s or the The Holy Word’s. Ostensibly, the Bard’s voice relays the voice of the Holy Word as it spoke in, one may infer, the Garden of Eden, after the fall.

Calling the lapsed soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might control
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

The most likely interpretation of this poem seems to be, baroquely, that the visionary Bard is telling us what he hears the Holy Word say, as the Holy Word seeks the newly fallen Adam and Eve. Yet, immediately, there is a conflation between the Holy Word and the hiding, weeping “lapsed soul.” It seems impossible to determine whether it is the lapsed soul that “might control / The starry pole,” or whether the Holy Word itself has itself become lost. Is it the lapsed soul “weeping in the evening dew” or the Holy Word? Tellingly, the Holy Word does not call to Adam and Eve but to the Earth:

“O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass!
Night is worn, And the morn
Rises from the slumbrous mass.

“Turn away no more;
Why wilt thou turn away?
The starry floor,
The watery shore,

Are given thee till the break of day.’’

Apparently, a greater lapse has occurred than the lapse of the original man and woman. The Earth itself, or the entire material creation, has lapsed. One might ask here why the Holy Word apparently lacks the power to the “fallen, fallen light renew”? If the verse indeed describes the Holy Word calling to the fallen Earth, then one must ask why the Earth has so resolutely turned away, weeping in the dewy grass? The figure is very much that of a woman, turned away from a man who has granted her a domestic domain. The morning (the sun, the light, enlightened reason) may rise “from the slumberous mass,” but Earth refuses to do so.⁷⁸ The last three lines are a bit of a riddle (“The starry floor, / The watery shore, / Are given thee till the break of day”) but seem to refer to the moony, feminine, and receptive realm of dreamy night into which Earth has withdrawn, and from which it is expected to awake in the morning.⁷⁹

If this seems a genuinely heartfelt call for the return to the light of a world that has fallen into darkness, it takes on a different cast in relation to the poem that follows, “Earth’s Answer,” which I cite in full:

EARTH’S ANSWER

Earth raised up her head
From the darkness dread and drear,
Her light fled,

⁷⁸ One could argue, drawing on Roderick Tweedy’s insights, that the relational right brain refuses to heed the organizing call of the instrumental left brain.

⁷⁹ One can compare this to a poem I will discuss later, Shelley’s *Triumph of Life* and its opening lines about the despotic, self-righteous sun:

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task
Of glory & of good, the Sun sprang forth
Rejoicing in his splendour, & the mask
Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth...
Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear
Their portion of the toil which he of old
Took as his own & then imposed on them...

Stony, dread,
And her locks covered with grey despair.

“Prisoned on watery shore,
Starry jealousy does keep my den
Cold and hoar;
Weeping o’re,
I hear the father of the ancient men. ‘

‘Selfish father of men!
Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!
Can delight,
Chained in night,
The virgins of youth and morning bear?

“Does spring hide its joy,
When buds and blossoms grow?
Does the sower
Sow by night,
Or the plowman in darkness plough?

“Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around!
Selfish, vain,
Eternal bane,
That free love with bondage bound.”

Here, in a remarkable vegetative image, the enervated Earth actually raises her head (“Stony, dread, / And her locks covered with grey despair”) to respond to the authoritative Bard, who speaks, no less, for the Holy Word. She is indeed in terrible misery, like a wife who has been too long oppressed by a husband. What she reveals is that the night, and “watery” emotion, is not “given” to her. On the contrary, she is “prisoned” by “Starry jealousy / Cold and hoar” or by the “Cruel, jealous, selfish fear!” of the “Selfish father of men!” Explicitly, she associates herself with “delight,” which is “Chained in night” (and therefore cannot “bear” an awareness of the “virgins of youth and morning”). It is patriarchy or masculine authority that keeps her bound in darkness, for fear of her relationality – a fear she questions as darkly selfish and psychologically distorted:

“Does spring hide its joy, / When buds and blossoms grow? / Does the sower / Sow by night, / Or the plowman in darkness plough?”

Although the diction and imagery signal sexual repression, the more powerful implication is the repression of etho-ecological relationality. As Blake’s famous engraving of Urizen in fetters with tears streaming from his eyes reflects, the notion of the “heavy chain” (of empiricist psychology, or the optics of finitude) that binds and freezes emotion or relation recurs in Blake’s oeuvre. The “Selfish father of men,” one can infer, is not so much an entity but a modern epistemic regime that curbs intelligent feeling or bars etho-ecological attention.

Gradually, I hope to suggest that what Blake calls the “Selfish father of men” is very much the sensationalist psychology given its most explicit eighteenth century expression by Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which I read as an effort to reduce the etho-ecological dimensions of “sympathy” to a calculative act. (Arguably, the word sympathy had much wider and richer connotations for the nonmoderns than it does for the moderns). This might provoke one to, turning Blake’s phrase around, read Smith as the father of the modern doctrine of “self-interest” or “private psychology” (Whitehead): *the father of selfish men*. I mention this now because Earth’s answer or “Gaia’s intrusion” (Stengers) is very much on the minds of constructivist or speculative materialist thinkers, particularly those working across the boundaries of political ecology and science studies. This is not only a question of *innocence* (the return to view of interrelation) but of *experience* (the uncanny effects of the disruption of centered logos by excess).⁸⁰ What

⁸⁰ For these reasons, I consider Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern* one of the nodal points of this study. I return to it repeatedly because, to me, it argues that the disruptions of centered optics that we are currently experiencing, thanks to Gaia’s return (the ecological crisis), are in fact the same kind of disruptions that Blake was trying to effect in modern experience. Blake and Latour provoke awareness of centered logos as a myth in which we have never believed; instead, we have imposed it for the sake of disembodied power. Modernity, in that sense, is always pressed upon by a different kind of time, composed of ethical interrelations that Blake calls “infinite” or “eternal,” not to suggest an inexhaustible

is coming into view again, for constructivists, is not simply the real complexity of systems and networks, which behave *like* agents,^{xxvi} but the postsecular encounter with interrelations that (not only seem but) are animate.⁸¹

“Earth’s Answer” has apparently come, and it is a bit more chthonic and retributive than even Blake anticipated. In *Songs of Experience*, his “voice of the Bard,” summons the “lapsed soul” back to the light, or the dead back to life:

“O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass!
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumbrous mass.”
(*Earth’s Answer*)

Yet, in the answering verse, Earth turns the tables, identifying this apparently benevolent paternal voice as the “selfish father of men!”⁸² Like speculative feminists today, she refuses the call to come out of the fallen elements of feeling (water, earth, night) into the “cold” light of reason, questioning the “starry jealousy” of the disembodied astral gods: “The chthonic powers of Terra infuse its tissues everywhere, despite the civilizing efforts of the agents of sky gods to astralize them and set up chief Singletons and their tame committees of multiples or subgods, the One and the Many” (Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking”). Blake’s Earth seems to give the same answer as Haraway’s Medusan Gaia: “Flourishing will be cultivated as a multispecies response-ability without the arrogance of the sky gods and their minions, or else biodiverse terra will flip out into

resource but to suggest more-than-finite or more-than-independent relation. Modernity is always pressed upon by sympathy.

⁸¹ Increasingly, Latour, and other constructivists (Haraway, Stengers) have been returning to the nonmodern notion of Gaia, rather than nature, precisely to register the extent to which our modern tendency to “deanimate” (Latour) the world or to deny official representation to the “middle kingdom” (Latour) of “actants” has led to our confusion and dismay at Earth’s “tentacular” (Haraway) intrusion.

⁸² And as the gruesome materialist optics of “life-in-death.”

something very slimy, like any overstressed complex adaptive system at the end of its abilities to absorb insult after insult” (Haraway). Daringly, “Earth’s Answer” exposes the Bard’s voice as the will-to-power of modern optics, over a world it casts as fallen. It introduces *Songs of Experience* as a haunting address, from a voice that is frozen and bound in iron epistemic chains, to a postsecular modernity.

Yet, as much as Earth speaks (like a downtrodden wife to a robust husband) the scandalous truth that phallogocentric optics murders relationship, we do not see her break this chain and become Medusa. In Blake’s oeuvre, Mark Lussier argues, this will have to wait until later poems; the “failed deterritorializations” attempted by Earth in “Earth’s Answer” and by Thel in *The Book of Thel* are, he suggests, carried to successful realization by Oothoon in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (Lussier, “Blake’s Deep Ecology”). That said, “Earth’s Answer,” in its call to a future that will release “free love” from the “heavy chain” of a frozen rationality, certainly already expresses Blake’s quintessential brand of etho-ecological jouissance, or of what Haraway calls “multispecies flourishing.” On the whole, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* share speculative feminism’s optimism about “wildly available” models of “sympoiesis and symbiosis” (Haraway).

Indeed, to read Blake is to be exposed to a more-than-human speech that reminds us of the extent to which we have never silenced “free love” or promiscuous interrelation, or the extent to which “we have never been modern” (Latour). This speculative materialist back-reading of Blake, as Lussier concedes in the opening to his essay “Blake’s Deep Ecology,” might seem “controversial, in that it applies a contemporary political view to past poets and their poetry,” and may seem to commit the sin of presentism, but might also be considered “necessary... because it directly responds to a physical crisis in which all are implicated and requires us to

rethink our intellectual enterprises and institutions.” Blake saw, as clearly as political ecologists do today, that modernity exists by a contract to circumscribe attention. This is not lost on a Blake scholar like Lussier, who uses Latour’s definition of the nonmodern to clarify Blake’s resistance to the “Modern turn” (408):

No one has ever been modern. Modernity has never begun. There has never been a modern world. ... A nonmodern is anyone who takes simultaneously into account the moderns' Constitution [as defined by the radical separation of Nature and Society] and the population of hybrids that that Constitution rejects and allows to proliferate. (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 47)

If, in Latour’s sense, “we have stopped being modern” because the modern contract has now become too ineffective “in its dual task of separation and proliferation,” then this implies, as Haraway argues, that deanimating optics have become unthinkable. The “bracketed middle term” (Massumi) – be it movement, relation, or sympathy – returns to view. The “sensationalist doctrine” (Whitehead) or the “private psychology” (Whitehead) of Smithian self-interest becomes recognizable as the optics of a control society.

Here, I propose that Blake’s brand of etho-ecology and postsecular “animation” runs even closer to the speculative materialism of Stengers than Latour and even Haraway.⁸³ Where Latour advances a more rigorous (or radical empiricist) secularism, Haraway and Stengers advance an intense postsecular challenge to secularism. This challenge exceeds Latour’s view that “nature” (a religious or metaphysical concept adopted by science) has now become visible not as the domain of fact-as-ultimate-arbiter but as networks of processes in which culture (values, modes of representation) is thoroughly interimplicated. Where Latour might be said to apply modulating

⁸³ Noting our unceremonious entry into the “Anthropocene,” Latour asks what is next: “if we can no longer separate the work of proliferation from the work of purification, what are we going to become?” His own approach has been to “aspire to Enlightenment without modernity,” in the sense of a secularism that renews the face of the earth, shedding all residual claims to pure partitions between knowledge and action, science and politics, information and ethics, nature and culture.

secular rationality to the question of the extent to which Gaia must now be understood as agential, speculative feminists have been less hesitant to encounter an animist Gaia, not simply in the form of an unmotherly avenging fury, or nonhuman specter of the “Chthulucene” (Haraway), but more expansively as Oothoon,⁸⁴ a figure of the feminine in Blake’s *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* who articulates, more radically than Earth in *Songs of Experience*, the no-longer-barred domain of interrelation.⁸⁵

Personally, I am inspired by Stengers’s Whiteheadian tack, which errs to the side of infinite and interrelational tenderness. (Stengers, after all, coined the phrase – which I have so much abused – “etho-ecology”). If one takes Whitehead’s view that modernity has repudiated metaphysics for dogmatic ends, then the answer to the question of how far to go may be: into a postsecular turn. The challenge to modernity implicit in romanticism is, at its most ingenuous, the Whiteheadian proposition that an element of experience (an intensivity transmitted in “pulses of emotion”) pervades the universe. In plainest terms, the etho-ecological model poses what Einstein called a “religious” challenge. Given the twenty-first century’s emerging postsecular trends (posthumanism, multispecies studies, contemplative studies), this “religious” challenge might better be called a postsecular challenge.

⁸⁴ Contrasting Thel (a feminine figure who, like the Earth of “Earth’s Answer,” expresses the horror implied in a modern materialist optics) with Oothoon, as a figure of “becoming-woman,” Lussier comments that “[w]hile Thel’s line of deterritorialized flight fails, Oothoon’s nomadic journey [in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*] succeeds” (265). Like the Earth of “Earth’s Answer,” Oothoon inhabits the position of this voice of deterritorialization, at the “event horizon” (Lussier, Francois) of the more-than-human, but in ways that allow her to affirm an interrelational haptics.

⁸⁵ Here, the difference may simply be one of degree. How far does one go, “struggling and experimenting today... [as] a true contemporary of... ‘the intrusion of Gaia,’ this ‘nature’ that has left behind its traditional role and now has the power to question us all” (Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times*)? Haraway responds by advocating a radical shift from the “astral” to the “Terran”: “The Greek word *Gorgon* translates as dreadful, but perhaps that is an astralized, patriarchal hearing of much more awful stories and enactments of generation, destruction, and tenacious, ongoing terran finitude...” (“Tentacular Thinking”).

2 Whitehead and Virtual or Nonhuman Attention

"...those who use the term [physis] mean to say that nature is the first creative power; but if the soul turns out to be the primeval element, and not fire or air, then in the truest sense and beyond other things the soul may be said to exist by nature; and this would be true if you proved that the soul is older than the body, but not otherwise."- Plato's *Laws*, Book 10

I have chosen to treat the etho-ecological proposition of romantic poetry as a serious address to an alternative modernity, on the grounds that it affirms the dangerousness of sensitive attention. At the heart of romanticism's postsecular etho-ecological challenge to modernity is the premise that *natura naturans* (the visitational presence of fluent interrelations, the so-called "world soul" in excess of "physis") can and does intrude upon the listening or attentive mind.

One of the paradigmatic instances of this intrusion or visitation is the "Boy of Winander" passage of Book Five of *The Prelude*. The (posthumous) boy often stands blowing "mimic hootings to the silent owls" across the waters of a lake, in ambiguous liminal hours when the "earliest" stars are either "rising or setting." Yet "sometimes," in the sensitive act of listening for the owls, he inadvertently allows the presence of the fluent world itself to inundate his mind:

and, when a lengthened pause
Of silence came and baffled his best skill,
Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind,
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

As this oft-noted passage suggests, the sense of the mysterious, or the felt presence of the undivided world, without the ego, takes consciousness by surprise, and remains inappropriable to knowledge, as an “open secret” (Francois) or “the deepest secret nobody knows” (Cummings). Etho-ecological attention is in this sense nonanthropocentric. One might call it equally an act of extra-human attention, an act of attention to the extra-human, and an act of attention without the human.

Such ideas may seem wild and unphilosophical, but recent theorists have been turning to Whitehead precisely because he offers a technical and philosophical language by which to question the modern overemphasis on cognition. For Whitehead, I will repeat, “consciousness presupposes experience, and not experience consciousness” (PR 53). As he comments in *Modes of Thought*: “we should conceive mental operations as among the factors which make up the constitution of nature” (Lecture 8, “Nature Alive”). In effect, he dethrones and decenters human consciousness, and cognition-centered models of experience, in favor of a model of intensivity and creativity (or, in Bergson’s sense, the virtual).^{xxvii} Attention, in this postsecular sense, *undoes* cognition. Romantic poetry, I repeat, is characterized by a poetics of etho-ecological attention.

One of Wordsworth’s names for this haptic event – this moment of attention, this “feeling of life endless” (*P.13.183*) or “prime and vital principle” (*P.13.194*) of tenderness, this visitation of “feeling intellect” or imagination – is, unsurprisingly, love:

...thou call’st this love
And so it is, but there is higher love
Than this, a love that comes into the heart
With awe and a diffusive sentiment;
Thy love is human merely; this proceeds
More from the brooding Soul, and is divine....

This love more intellectual cannot be
 Without Imagination, which, in truth,
 Is but another name for absolute strength
 And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
 And reason in her most exalted mood....
 Imagination having been our theme,
 So also hath that intellectual love,
 For they are each in each, and cannot stand
 Dividually....
 'Tis thine,
 The prime and vital principle is thine...
 ...and he whose soul hath risen
 Up to the height of feeling intellect
 Shall want no humbler tenderness, his heart
 Be tender as a nursing Mother's heart...
 (P.13.160 – 207)

If, revising Plato, one takes etho-ecological affection as a “primeval element” (Plato) – or “prehension” as “primordial” (Whitehead) – then in “the truest sense and beyond other things the soul may be said to exist by nature” (Plato).⁸⁶

One might object that such concerns lie outside the purview of critical theory, and of literary criticism, but does not this very objection suggest that critical theory and literary criticism, as modes of modern thought, repudiate metaphysics and, by extension, philosophy? The key point is that the modern repudiation of philosophical metaphysics, and the tacit dismissal of the mind-brain question, is presented in romantic poetry as a kind of psychological bondage (a crossed-out metaphysics) that results in agonizing modern self-isolation, and that reinforces a psychopathic and irresponsible optics

⁸⁶ Increasingly, scholars are pointing to Whitehead as a crucial thinker for the redressal of the epistemic ruptures that underpin our global crises. One of the great challenges presented by Whitehead (and his radical empiricist predecessors) is that of reconnecting attention with aesthetic ontology. To do so is to unsettle the myth of private psychology. In place of cognition, Whitehead put prehension. The clarity of consciousness, he proposes, comes at the cost of “a large penumbral region of experience which tells of intense experience in dim apprehension” (PR 267). Perhaps it may seem odd that he favors murky intensity *over* clear extensivity, or prehension over cognition. But for him this “dim apprehension” of intensity *is* “concrete” lived intuition. Famously, in *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead points to British Romantic poetry as exemplary of this “feeling for nature.”

of self-interest. In this sense, M.H. Abrams was quite right to suggest that Wordsworth was not a nature poet but a love poet. Yet this love poetry, far from merely florid and decorative, is a poetics of resistance. Romantic poetry is very much concerned, as Laura Quinney argues, with the dark psychological consequences of empiricism, or with the cruel and iron limits set upon attention in its fullest etho-ecological sense (sympathy, love, interrelation) by modern secular materialism.^{xxviii}

Although Whitehead makes no mention of Blake, I will continue to transition from Wordsworth to Blake, as the primary context for postsecular modernity, because now – in the twenty first century, as Urizenic regimes provoke “Earth’s Answer”⁸⁷ – Blake’s insistence on poetic attention holds the most fruitful resonances with Whitehead’s organic realism. In *Auguries of Innocence*, Blake implies that active, sensitive, haptic attention is the only remedy for consciousness-as-reification: “We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see not Thro the Eye.” Likewise, in *There Is No Natural Religion*, Blake emphasizes that sensationalist optics is far from the whole story of lived experience: “Man’s perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he percieves more than sense (tho’ ever so acute) can discover.”^{xxix}

⁸⁷ “Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around
Selfish! vain!
Eternal bane!
That free Love with bondage bound.”
Blake, “Earth’s Answer”

3 Blake in a Time of Emergency: enactivism and activist philosophy

“Reason, or the Ratio of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more.” (Blake, NNR)

“And never for each other shall we feel
As we may feel till we have sympathy
With nature in her forms inanimate...”
(William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*)

A certain recursivity of argument seems unavoidable.⁸⁸ Whitehead may be emerging, in the twenty first century, as the most lucid critic of the excision of a metaphysics of nature from scientific materialism, but he was himself deeply influenced by (presumably reactionary) romantic poetry. In *Understanding Whitehead*, Victor Lowe argues that Wordsworth’s poetics of “feeling intellect,” “visitation,” and “interfusion” was pivotal in shaping Whitehead’s thought (Lowe 257). Like Wordsworth, Whitehead registers the tender ethical presence of “natura naturans” as the “affective tone” (Whitehead) of intuitive experience.⁸⁹ Wordsworth (and Blake) anticipate Whitehead’s rethinking of the classical “notions of perspective, reflection, and viewpoint” (Stengers 178) which, like “perception” are “henceforth a dangerous abstraction from the point of view of the organism” (178). In turn, Whitehead’s emphasis on the “dynamics of infection” (178) clarifies the realism, rather than idealism, that sees “into the life of things” (Wordsworth).

Yet the term “romantic” continues to make intellectuals queasy. Romantic “beautiful soul syndrome” has come to be blamed in recent eco-criticism (such as Morton’s *Ecology without*

⁸⁸ Duly considered, after all, the haptic and optic modes relate as “Contraries,” which “mutually Exist,” rather than “Negations,” which “Exist Not” (Blake, *Jerusalem*, Plate 17, E 161). The problem, arguably, is the temptation to privilege the optic mode, and to take the isolated locations it presents as genuinely immune to or exempt from interrelation.

⁸⁹ As Marjorie Levinson has proposed, this points to “le Spinozism” (Deleuze) as one of the deepest common contexts for ongoing currents of “radical enlightenment” (Israel).

Nature) for the appropriative subsumption of nature by culture. The romantics are suspected of substituting, for the ecological, an ideological aesthetic fantasy about Nature.

The concern of this study, thus far, has been less with specific romantic poets such as Wordsworth or with Blake than with the relevance of the romantic proposition (the notion of an intelligent, feeling universe) to the crisis of the twenty first century. Is this etho-ecological, postsecular, alternative modernity in fact becoming thinkable to us, or does it remain distastefully flighty? Is Donna Haraway right that the postclassical sciences – with their “wildly and wonderfully available and generative” models of symbiogenesis (“Tentacular Thinking”) – have made the old model of independent individuality unthinkable? In this section, I will make the case that the etho-ecological continues to be squeezed by critical theorists into a secular framework, just as Blake’s postsecularism continues to be squeezed by literary critics into a secular framework. In this context, it may help to consider the ways in which Blake continues to exceed secular exegesis, falling on the wrong side (from modernity’s perspective) of the mind-brain paradox.

First, though, to answer the question of the growing thinkability of an etho-ecological modernity, and at the same time register the policing of that thinkability, I will point to the resurgence, since the early 1990s, of embodied thought, which draws on a tradition most clearly advanced by thinkers such as Spinoza, Schelling, and Whitehead. Thinkers in biology and brain science have been drawn to this embodied philosophy, expressed in Spinoza’s maxim, “the mind is an idea of the body.”⁹⁰ This trend toward embodied philosophy has had an impact on romantic studies.

⁹⁰ One of the groundbreaking moments in the embodied turn was the publication of *The Embodied Mind* (1992), in which Varela, Rosch and Thompson proposed an influential new model of enactivism, grounded on a model of autopoiesis. Yet, despite its refreshing emphasis on participatory interaction

Yet, as Mark Lussier's various essays on Blake clarify, the romantic "episteme of wholeness" may be receiving positive reassessment during this "moment of contemporary crisis," but the verdict remains split between a suspicion of romantic "aesthetic ideology" and appreciation for the ways in which romantic writers responded to the "fragmentation" produced by the "fissure of subject-object relations at [first-stage enlightenment thought's] foundation" ("Self-Annihilation/Inner Revolution"):

...Blake's attempt to unveil the insidious potential of the enlightenment episteme at its moment of inception and replace it with an episteme of wholeness gained little attention in his own day, and what attention it did receive was usually hostile. It is only at this moment of contemporary crisis that such an ethical stance has gained widespread acceptance, even in the hard sciences from which the enlightenment episteme emerged. However, in some critical assessments of our current "postmodern" condition, the eradication of nature has reached its zenith. For Jameson, "The other of our society is ... no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify" (35). As a symptom of postmodernism, this might be an accurate statement, but Nature, as it were, has represented itself with a vengeance in the form of a despoiled ecological system. (Lussier "Blake's Deep Ecology" 407)

As Lussier intimates, the ecological emergency presses us to admit the relational consequences of our intellectual stances. This may mean stretching a bit beyond our comfort zone to understand Wordsworth's "intellectual love." It may also mean unseaming the secular, which for centuries has tokened tolerance, objectivity, rationality, and sanity. Secular materialism, I have been

between organism and environment, and its sensitivity to the embeddedness of sensorimotor systems in biological, psychological and cultural contexts, recent enactivist thought embraces neurophenomenology in ways that bracket the mind. This reintroduces the "hard problem" of the explanatory gap between matter and mind, even as it runs the risk of "heroic feats of explaining away" (Whitehead). In *Process and Reality* (1929), Whitehead famously declared that his perspective, in its fidelity to lived experience, was closer to eastern thought (which "makes process ultimate") than to western thought (which "makes fact ultimate"). Likewise, Varela, who argued that western thought needs to develop an experiential mode of inquiry, engaged in one of his last papers, "Life After Kant," with Whitehead's idea of a "subject pole" in biological systems. As suggested by integral philosopher Matthew Tarnas Segall, the moment is ripe for lively discussion of the relative merits of a more ontologically underdetermined embodied phenomenology versus process-relational ontology, in spelling out the implications of enactivism. Haraway, likewise, in calling for a shift from autopoiesis to sympoiesis, and from Anthropocene to Chthulucene ("Tentacular Thinking"), seems to anticipate a convergence of constructivism and enactivism.

attempting to demonstrate, makes the affective links between the aesthetic, the body, and the imagination unthinkable. It identifies both the aesthetic and the imagination with forms of representation, to the exclusion of etho-ecological flow. To modern sensibilities, *cognition* not etho-ecological feeling is the common ground between the aesthetic and the imagination. Thus, a vital task of speculative materialism is to mitigate the tendency to approach aesthetics via an obsessive critique of the representational.^{xxx}

What, one may ask, has a romantic poet like William Blake to do with these twenty-first century tensions between aesthetic ontology and mediationalism?⁹¹ The short answer is that Blake remains a vital figure of what Brian Massumi has dubbed “activist” philosophy or the “occurrent arts” – radical aesthetics that expresses this quality of passage, virtuality, and intensivity.^{xxxi} After Northrop Frye’s classic study, *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), Blake’s work has been understood to relentlessly breach its compositions with interrelations (Otto, Lussier, Goldsmith, Hutchings). His maxim “The eye altering alters all” suggests a perceptual challenge that is more than “hypertextual” and “writerly” (Barthes) in its foregrounding of the ever-occurring choice between optic and haptic (spectral and relational) modes of vision.

To effect this multi-modal challenge to the “Spectre” of the isolating eye, Blake developed a unique process of relief-etching (a reversal of the intaglio mode) that allowed in-the-moment decisions about modal “entwinements” (Leslie) that troubled surface and background, “melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid” (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). In a digital essay in *ImageTextT: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, Esther Leslie describes how, in Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the page’s almost animate surface is “brimful with data:

⁹¹ In mediationalism, the objective world becomes a “conjecture” and the subjective world a “dream” (Whitehead). The solution to this disembodied, “camouflaged” metaphysics, Whitehead proposes in *The Concept of Nature*, is to throw off “the influence of theory” and to return to an instinctive trust that “by due attention, more can be found in nature than that which is observed at first sight” (30).

small outlines of figures, snakes, vegetables, twiddled lines, words, colour washes, coloured words, scenes of struggle and repose.” As Leslie puts it, the page's surface “fizzes with life” or “swarms”: strands of hair become waterfalls, vines transmute into letters, affects overflow graphemes. In the language of speculative feminism, “autopoietic” composition becomes “sympoietic” intrusion (Haraway, Stengers).

Perhaps because of the coincidence of Blake's birth with the onset of the “great acceleration,” his work actively reveals movement, not only in the “vagrant” mobilities (Pinch) of the “planet-transforming” and “infectious industrial revolution” (Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking”) but also in the intrusion (back into modern view) of suppressed nonhuman interrelations, described by philosophers of science as the crossed-out “middle kingdom” of “actants” (Latour). This eco-perceptual potential has drawn comparisons with filmic ecologies. Montage pioneer Sergei Eisenstein, for instance, was inspired by Blake's hymn to “dear Mother outline, of knowledge most sage” (*Satirical Verses*) or to “the contour line and its animating possibilities” (Leslie). Blake's emphasis on the vitality of attention has strong resonances, today, with Jane Bennett's call in *Vibrant Matter* for a “countercultural kind of perceiving” or for “cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body” (Bennett xiv). Increasingly, it is possible to connect Blake's decentering of optic modes of perception, which reinforce rational self-interest, with an incipient postsecular and etho-ecological modernity.

Methodologically, the current study strives to bring Blake's visual and verbal mythopoiesis into contact with the daring and joyfully subversive twenty-first century thought of speculative feminist materialists (Stengers, Haraway, Braidotti, and Bennett).⁹² Like Blake, speculative

⁹² I am currently unfamiliar with, but interested in, Catherine Keller's theopoetics.

feminists focus, through fabulation and parody, on “other ways to reworld, reimagine, relive, and reconnect with each other, in multispecies well-being” (Haraway). Irresistibly optimistic⁹³ and wickedly satirical,⁹⁴ Blake provokes the kind of haptic perception that speculative feminists have associated with a reclaimed animism or vitalism, in which the image resumes a decolonized life of “new transversal connections” (Stengers) - be it “miraculous” or “magic” (Stengers) or gorgonic and “tentacular” (Haraway).

After Whitehead, several waves of interdisciplinary male thinkers (Deleuze, Varela, Latour, Connolly, Massumi) have taken “steps toward an ecology of mind” (Bateson). Yet, I would argue, it is speculative feminism that has proven the most Blakean or the most counter-perceptual. Haraway, for instance, argues in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) that the anthropocentrism that persists in apparently new terms such as autopoiesis and Anthropocene “saps our capacity for imagining and caring for other worlds.” In Blakean ways, she directs us instead toward “noncolonizing arts, sciences, and politics” that attend to “sympoiesis, symbiosis, symbiogenesis.”^{xxxii}

⁹³ As in the celebrated lines from the preface to *Milton*:

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land.

⁹⁴ As in the poem *Infant Sorrow*:

My mother groand! my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless, naked, piping loud;
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my fathers hands:
Striving against my swaddling bands:
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mothers breast.

One might think that the unique success with which Blake's work has moved into digital formats signals a dynamic shift in his twenty-first century reception. The movement of Blake Studies into the digital humanities raced to an early start with the hypertextual digital dissemination of Blake (www.blakearchive.org/) and with essay collections/websites such *Blake 2.0: William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music and Culture*, a collaborative project between Canadian and British Blake scholars (zoamorphosis.com). Yet much remains to be done, especially considering Blake's opposition of the epigenetic line (Gigante) to the proto-digital printing techniques of his day. Claire Colebrook's *Blake, Deleuzian Aesthetics, and the Digital* (2012) has explored the question of whether Blake's haptic aesthetics – in what Haraway might call its mode of “intrusion rather than composition” – is in fact digital (disruptive and particular) or analogical (fluid and relational). Extending Colebrook's insights, I would link Blake's intrusive and wild reworldings (what Otto calls his “broachings” of the totalizing world or image) to those of speculative feminism.

4 *Laocoön*: “Art deliverd from / Nature & Imitation”

Blake's annotated print *Laocoön* takes an ancient Greek sculpture and subjects it to a critical revision, recasting *Laocoön* and his sons as "Jehovah & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim Of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact or History of Ilium." Crammed with poetic annotations in several languages, Blake's print invites one to rethink the Classical sculpture, praised over the centuries as a work that depicts non-redemptive suffering yet preserves aesthetic beauty, as a bad copy of a work of inspired Judeo-

Christian art. For Blake, the *Laocoön* was, in effect, originally a representation of an important psychological truth, appropriated and misinterpreted by the Greeks. It is as if the Greeks dogmatically impose convention (extensivity) over inspiration (intensivity), covering up the direct challenge to the viewer, as centered observer, implicit in the scene of a suffering father with his two sons, cast as a children's story about the gods and the punishment of an errant priest.

If one reads between the wild lines of the text that Blake superimposes on the Classical work, the “inspired” meaning of the *Laocoön* is that the divine humanity has split itself into Adam, or the human being conceived along naturalistic and materialist lines, and Satan, the abstract reasoning power that, despite an apparently modest insistence on the material basis of human consciousness, tacitly asserts itself as “sovereign” (radically disembodied and metaphysically independent) – a spectral optics that Blake calls the Spectre. The serpent that coils around, and envenoms, the father and his sons, in this context, is Lilith, whom Blake associates with materialism. Implied, then, is the suffering endured by the modern psyche, which has reduced the human being, and the representation of the human being in art, to an unredemptive naturalism: “He repented that he had made Adam / (of the Female, the Adamah) / & it grieved him at his heart.”

One might read this as evidence that Blake is an anti-materialist, or a religious idealist, not to mention a masculinist, but to do so would be to miss the main thrust of his critique of naturalism or materialism as, tacitly, a mode of abstraction, or a mode that subtracts or *negates* tender relation from objects and subjects, purifying them as isolated locations (beings rather than becomings). Naturalism, as extensive optics, is linked then to the epistemic doctrine of the self-limited individual, the Urizenic “Selfhood,” or what Blake calls the “Negation.”

The print's basic contrasts are, notably, not between science and religion, but between science and *art* (naturalism and imagination, knowledge and creativity). If Blake links *science* explicitly with empire, money, and war, he does so to emphasize a contrast between extensivity and intensivity, perception and prehension, optics and haptics. What he points to, then, above all, is the epistemic violence of modern sensationalist optics.⁹⁵

The crucial phrase in Blake's print, *Laocoön*, I would argue, is "denying Immediate / Communion with God" – less because it proves that Blake's agenda is to oppose materialism with religion than that it clarifies what he means by vision as a haptic event that modern optics debars. Like Whitehead, Blake is primarily concerned with questioning modern epistemic bans on felt interrelation or "immediate communion":

Divine Union
Deriding
And Denying Immediate
Communion with God

Subverting the classical and conventional narrative of *Laocoön*, Blake prompts the reader-viewer to rethink its inspired meaning, that human experience or attention has been split between Adam (the mere body, or naturalism) and Satan (abstract reason, or the dogmatic metaphysics of centered, transcendent, and pure mind). Naturalistic art *conceals* this intensive truth with an extensive idea. In that sense, Blake engages in "Spiritual War" by inciting the viewer to rethink the blandly mythical Laocoön and his two sons as Jehovah & his two Sons Satan & Adam. Of course, it is vital to remember that for Blake these Biblical figures (Jehovah, Satan, and Adam) are (as borne out by the mythology he builds around Urizen, and by his subversive identifications of Jehovah either with the false god, pure Reason, or with the fiery demon of promiscuous Desire) extremely

⁹⁵ Which H. G. Wells (in an early work of science fiction that hinges on the Blakean conceit of Martians who are literally all-brain or all-abstract intellect) describes as "serene in [its] assurance of [its] empire over matter" (*War of the Worlds*).

direct symbols for the bifurcation of experience, or of the “fall” into the Cartesian split between reason and body. Imaginative art makes this challenge to failed or fallen perception (and its consequent state of psychological isolation) directly visible as the very purpose of art:⁹⁶

Spiritual War
Israel deliverd from Egypt
is Art deliverd from
Nature & Imitation

For Blake, urgently, art itself needs to be delivered. Art is itself the site where the battle over perception takes places. Both art and perception are encumbered by devouring serpents, the vegetative fibers of a materialist optics that produces self-interested forms of grasping and fear:

What can be Created
Can be Destroyed
Adam is only
The Natural Man
& not the Soul
or Imagination

5 Blake, eco-disaster, and the fires of Eden

“It is in respect to this 'stubborn fact' that the theories of modern philosophy are weakest. Philosophers have worried themselves about remote consequences, and the inductive formulations of science. They should confine attention to the rush of immediate transition. Their explanations would then be seen in their native absurdity.” (Whitehead, PR 128-9)

“The elucidation of meaning involved in the phrase 'all things flow' is one chief task of metaphysics...” (PR 208)

⁹⁶ Questionable as it may be whether Blake’s notion of imagination *can* be squared with monotheism (and whether he refers to God in a monotheistic sense) the main issue is the undoing of the modern circumscription of the senses in the etho-ecological event of perception.

In Whitehead's notion of "fluency" or "creativity" one finds perhaps the single greatest continuity between Blake and Wordsworth. For Whitehead, the concrete event *is* fluency, restored to modern view by the post-classical sciences themselves. Yet, even as science (and, perhaps, modernity) appears to be shifting from an optics of finitude to a haptics of fluency, it would seem that the damage of the old optics may be irreversible. In 2003 Sir Martin Rees, one of Britain's most distinguished theoretical astrophysicists, published a book entitled *Our Final Century*, using hard scientific methods to set the odds of civilization coming to an end in the 21st century as high as 50:50.⁹⁷ On a positive note, though, an etho-ecological focus on fluency may bring optimism even to this dark situation. For Haraway and other speculative feminists, the old story of gloom and apocalypse is part and parcel of the logic of self-interest. And, as the romantics (and Blake in particular) never tired of pointing out, the relaxation of the optics of finitude (into etho-ecological attention) *is* infinity, paradise, or multispecies wellbeing.

Fluency might be said to belong to a different apocalyptic tradition, which emphasizes transformation, specifically the renovation of attention and perception that Howard Bloom has dubbed "inner apocalypse." This is an idea to which my study of romanticism keeps returning: the romantic proposition that each moment or event of attention is potentially a revolution in one's mode of experience. This definition of romantic vision – as the undoing of static perception by fluent attention – may bring into view certain unexpected continuities between Blake's nineteenth century myth-making and the myth-making of recent filmmakers (such as Terence Malick, Andrei Tarkovsky, Lars von Trier, and Werner Herzog, as discussed in Adrian Ivakhiv's *Ecologies of the*

⁹⁷ Yet one could say, ironically, that Rees is using the optics of finitude in order to point out the disastrous consequences of the optics of finitude. One might also wonder whether, science and hard facts aside, the impulse to write a book like *Our Final Century* does not stem from a long monotheistic apocalyptic tradition.

Moving Image). What Blake has in common with these filmmakers is an apparent gloominess, which comes from an interest in exposing the nightmarish pain implicit in a static attention. Blake, for instance, produced dozens of poems and dozens of engravings that seem to highlight pain, bondage, and self-deception. Yet, arguably, the intention of this apparent gloom about human psychology is simply to point out that this nightmarish condition is not inevitable. To see “consolidated error” (Blake) directly is to go free of that error. To see that modern optics does violence to interrelationship is to see that the external crisis in the world is rooted in a fragmentary epistemology: the eco-disaster is a crisis of the human psyche. To this fragmented mode of socially constituted perception, ecological art implicitly responds with an aesthetic ontology of “flow.” In that sense, neither Blake nor recent eco-disaster filmmakers are as gloomy as they seem. Blake, in fact, breaks up linearity in ways that anticipate the techniques of eco-disaster filmmakers, who foreground the violence of linear forms of representation even as they alter linear perception through an immersion in “lived ecologies” (Ivakhiv).

To understand the etho-ecological impetus of Blake’s apparently apocalyptic art, it may help to consider Lussier’s explanation of how the “visual field” of Blake’s late prophecies challenges “the Sea of Time and Space” as a “nightmare realm.” Lussier proposes that Blake’s texts disrupt the optics “Selfhood” or private psychology, bringing “the tragic fate of subject formation into readerly consciousness” (“Self-Annihilation/inner revolution,” 45), with the positive consequence of opening hitherto proscribed possibilities for ecological subjectivity:

Through the dynamic operations of word and design, Blake generates an enriched semiotic textual environment specifically designed to unveil selfhood and stage self-annihilation in its most dramatic way, encoding the conditions for an inner revolution in the narrative and pictorial representation of that revolution... Blake’s illuminated prophecies achieve their complexities by drawing upon "disparate discourses to create a bricolage" (Mee 5), refracting linguistic and semiotic rays into a spectrum of aesthetic ex/pression (that is, both as representation and as counter-repression), and such artistic labor achieves a fusion that

underwrites "a new kind of body" and anticipates "a new kind of being" (Makdisi 262). ("Self-annihilation/inner revolution," 45)

Likewise, the cinema of eco-catastrophe (Ivakhiv), despite its apparent fascination with the abomination, might be said to deploy techniques of "counter-repression" to underwrite a "new kind of body."

Increasingly, Blake is recognized as an important predecessor to works of eco-catastrophe that emphasize the imbalances of the modern brain,⁹⁸ such as the 1982 documentary by Godfrey Reggio and Philip Glass, *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance*, a title invoking Hopi prophecies that situate modern industrial civilization as an "advance" away from harmony, in the context of cyclical degeneration. In his own way, Blake emphasizes the cyclical nature of the fall into misperception, referring in longer works such as *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, but already in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, to a six-thousand-year cycle.

As Peter Otto points out in *Visionary Deconstruction*, Blake's word for this cycle was, ironically, "Creation." For Blake, then, the whole creation, as outwardly perceived, is a closed and static perceptual scheme, the fiery annihilation of which he joyfully and "inferentially" provokes. Perhaps more explicitly than eco-disaster cinema, Blake presents etho-ecological attention as the undoing of dead perception or of the optics of finitude:

The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true, as I have heard from Hell.

For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life, and when he does the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt.

⁹⁸ A better word than "brain" here might be the more general term "psychology." Tweedy registers this: "Blake maintained that it is specifically the fallen and 'divided' nature of human rationality that has historically driven the emergence of Urizen as the dominant and controlling activity within the human brain, and that therefore it is the fallen and divided nature of this program that needs to be addressed before any meaningful reintegration of the psyche can take place" (Tweedy 234).

This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.

In Blake's ever-evolving mythopoiesis, the barring of Eden and the tree of life by the "covering Cherub"^{xxxiii} (or Reason, the purifying angel that wards off promiscuity) serves as an allegory for the barring of interrelation or intensivity from extensive consciousness. Blake would likely approve of the way that Keats, in *Ode to Psyche*, locates this unfabricated "fane" – this "untrodden region" and place of "wide quietness" or of un-preconceived etho-ecological attention – in the brain itself:

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched 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-ridged 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

These lines about "the wreath'd trellis of a working brain" have drawn the attention of neuroscientists as well as of literary critics oriented toward embodied poetics, such as Alan Richardson. A closer reading will follow, but the key point is that Keats locates this "fane" (or non-man-made altar) of *natura naturans* or intensivity within the brain or psyche. Suggested in both Blake and Keats, then, is the idea that etho-ecological attention is the experience to which religious mythology attempts to point, and that modernity, if it has dispensed with such mythology, can nevertheless become all the more aware of the links between silence, attention, felt interrelation, and poiesis. The key point is that awareness is fluid and has no private or isolated limits. In Whitehead's words, "The elucidation of meaning involved in the phrase 'all things flow'

is one chief task of metaphysics.... (PR 208). A “working brain” in this sense is less a noisy, thinking, partitioning brain than an intensely silent, sensitive, attentive one. What’s “at work” is intensivity rather than extensivity.

As Blake scholars such as S. Foster Damon and Roderick Tweedy point out, the six-thousand-year period, which appears to correspond to the known extent of western civilization, is also, for Blake, an analogy for the sixty years of a human lifespan, and to the length of time that it takes for Adam to develop into a Dragon (the devouring worm of a private, encrusted continuum of identity). Arguably then, in Blake, mythic time (six thousand years) is an allegory for psychological time (the sixty years of private selfhood), as though in dealing with the latter one fully deals with the former: a six-thousand-year burden of experience “ends” in the moment of etho-ecological attention. In that sense, Blake dramatizes the human mind’s embroilment in psychological time, only to point to a non-private or non-isolate (“eternal,” “infinite”) potential of attention. In writing of the “fall” of the Eternal man into division, as depicted in his unfinished *Vala*, or *The Four Zoas* – which dramatizes the division of Urizen (head) from the three other Zoas, Urthona (loins), Luvah (heart), and Tharmas (Sensation) – he challenges the reader to perceive without division.⁹⁹

In this sense, also, Blake poses a radical challenge to division, competition, violence, and war, pointing to their origin not in human differences but in the epistemic limits (the optics of isolated location) set on fluent, undivided attention.^{xxxiv} In Blake, both the individual psyche and western history develop in parallel toward a state of self-interest and isolation, or “War.” On one

⁹⁹ Blake, writes Tweedy, diagnosed “the emergence of a dominant rationalising, moralising, and abstracting power within the human brain, a power which he terms ‘Urizen’.... it mechanised and alienated itself from its own body. In Blake’s terms, Urizen’s bid for control of the human psyche profoundly affected and disturbed Luvah, Urthona, and Tharmas, the three other ‘Zoas’ which constitute the complete individual (corresponding to the emotional, imaginative, and physical systems within man)” (Tweedy 234).

hand, he seems to imply that the cyclical process of producing and shattering the false idea of limited Selfhood takes decades or even millennia: “error” (or the reified world of “Creation”) must consolidate into the violence of the self-involved dragon (encrusted in the jeweled breastplate of materialism, with its jealous astral gods) before it can be shed, and the human (etho-ecological attention) be free of its calculative “scales” or chains. On the other hand, he seems to imply that this “state” of “judgment” can be ended in each and every moment, through attention to reality without the covering cherub: looking “through” not “with” the organs of common sense. Arguably, the deepest optimism and most radical potential in Blake’s work lies in the latter proposition: that calcified materialist perception arises and can be dissolved in one event, or one arterial “pulsation” of attention.

To recap, Blake, like recent experimental and/or “cult” filmmakers, points to the atomistic ego (and its psychopathic, non-relational optics) as the cause not only of personal isolation and despair but also of the global ecological crisis. Blake, as Tweedy has observed, was one of the first critics of modernity to represent, through imaginative works, modern “man” as cold and rational CEO, whose emotional disconnection can choose short-term selfish profit at the cost of whole communities, cultures, species, and even life on Earth itself. One might, of course, argue that Blake, like disaster filmmakers, is simply heir to a Judeo-Christian apocalyptic logic (tracing the “fall” of man to the resurrection of the divine man, and to the last judgment). Most recent Blake scholars (Otto, Lussier, Makdisi, Goldsmith) begin from the idea that Blake’s work is *not* messianic, but concerned instead with undoing notions of purity and transcendence in favor of

promiscuity and relation.¹⁰⁰ Critics find that Blake does not posit a Jerusalem outside time, but rather “broaches” (Otto), “annihilates” (Lussier), or “unbuilds” (Goldsmith) its image.¹⁰¹

As I will examine in more detail, Blake depicted the last judgment not as a final judgment on the impure (sorting them, once and for all, from the pure), but as the ever-present potential to relax the ego’s rigid judgments into relational forgiveness: literally, an end *of* judgment. When Blake writes of “forgiveness of sin continually,” he means continuous self-forgiveness for falling into egoistic perception. If one reads Blake’s gradually evolving vision of the fall of Urizen into self-torment as pessimistic, then, one misses his inspired optimism. Likewise,¹⁰² to construe recent apocalyptic artists – poets, novelists, filmmakers, musicians, painters, and dancers who expose the nightmarish violence of modern optics – as “negative” and “critical” is to miss the counter-optics of their mode of their expression.

If readers today often trust Blake more than Wordsworth, perhaps this is because in the course of his life the former grew more expansive and optimistic, and the latter more contracted and pessimistic. Strong as the ontological commitment to flow (or to undoing the modern bar on flow) may be in Wordsworth, Blake staged a more dogged “mental fight” with modernity, adamant that all creative efforts, however small, have “eternal” implications.

¹⁰⁰ Blake’s counter-messianic art promises not “pure discourse” but the undoing of “curbs” on promiscuity (Goldsmith) — an “improvement of sensual enjoyment” that signals entry into an etho-ecological mode of experience (the creative fires of Eden).

¹⁰¹ In that sense, they continue the revival of Blake scholarship initiated by Frye, Bloom, Abrams, who locate his radicalism in his reinterpretation of the apocalypse in terms of a counter-cultural shift in modes of attention rather than a last judgment of the mastering center.

¹⁰² As Goldsmith has recently argued, compellingly, in *Blake’s Agitation*.

6 Tweedy and Whitehead: Blake's Urizen

“[The] slow realisation of the actual insanity of the contemporary mind is one of the most disturbing elements of Blake's whole output.” (Tweedy 249)

More than Wordsworth, Blake developed a mythos to dramatize what Roderick Tweedy describes as the socially-reinforced neuropsychological processes through which, on an individual and collective level, the extensive left brain comes to dominate the intensive right brain. In *The God of the Left Hemisphere: Blake, Bolte Taylor, and the Myth of Creation*, Tweedy offers a simple neurological means of understanding these rather complex issues, via the work of neuroscientists such as neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor (*My Stroke of Insight*) and literary-scholar-cum-doctor-and-psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist (*The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*). Ambitiously, Tweedy links McGilchrist's analysis of a disastrous neurological feedback loop in western society (the cultural reinforcement of calculative reason as the master rather than emissary of relational emotion) to Blake's mythic vision of the covering over, by the jewel-encrusted dragon of war and commerce, of those “portals of the brain” where “paradise” is “planted” by the “Eternal Great Humanity Divine” (Milton).¹⁰³

For Tweedy, Blake not only dramatizes the war that is going on in the brain between Edenic relational feeling and fallen abstract intellect, but provides opportunity after opportunity for the

¹⁰³ In my discussion of Keats's “Ode to Psyche,” I have offered an interpretation of etho-ecological intensivity, proposing that what makes it so most cognitively vital is precisely that it occurs in the brain without being of the brain. In that sense, it is the interface of “paradise” or “natura naturans” (felt interrelation/experiential) meaning with cognition.

reader to reopen the gates of paradise. Indeed, in the introduction to *The God of the Left Hemisphere*, Tweedy states his intention to reaffirm “Blake’s call... for reintegrating the imaginative and the analytical sides of human consciousness, the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere” (xix).¹⁰⁴ In Blakean “forgiveness” (the sympathetic recognition that individuals tend to be dominated by the “Selfhood”), Tweedy finds a potential cure to a modern condition that Blake figures as the “Spectre” split from its “emanation.” Ironically, the Spectre, which distorts its spontaneous movement toward relationship into compulsive possessiveness, *wants* to be rejoined with its emanation, but is too insecure, in its egoic fortress, to be vulnerable to feeling:

What the list of bihemispheric differences also suggests is that the left hemisphere’s more abstract, rigid, controlling, and law-enforcing tendencies may come not from a position of strength (as it might so often seem, and which it itself pretends to derive from), but one of profound weakness and ontological insecurity. *Blake’s depictions of Urizen portray not only a formidable and oppressive ordering Power within the brain but also a terrified and anxious entity, somehow imprisoned in an abstracted virtual world, which is itself trapped within an intensely vibrant, non-rational, sensuous ocean of animation and energy, constantly thinking of itself as one step removed from “reality”, from direct, spontaneous, intuited experience. This is exactly the predicament of Urizen. Far from being a happy, mighty Power, Blake consistently humanises him— even pities him.* This is the pity of the machine. The Book of Urizen is filled with descriptions of tears, weeping, struggle, perturbations, terrors, sorrow, torment. “Cold he wander’d on high, over their cities/In weeping & pain & woe!” (Ur 25:5 p. 82). Blake can humanise and sympathise with cold, destructive Urizenic logic, the imposing Rational Power of the human brain, because he understands where it is coming from. Many of Urizen’s drives are born from terror at existence, the fear of death, the fear of sex, the existential angst at being alive. Out of this terror he seeks to build himself a cave, a castle, a fortress— one made of building blocks, made of stone, made of atoms, made of metal, and encased as in an automaton, transmuting life itself into stone, into a machine. (Tweedy 121; emphasis added)

¹⁰⁴ I would add that the “imaginative” side of “human consciousness” may, in fact, exceed human consciousness. That is, I would emphasize the relationship between imagination and *natura naturans* or etho-ecological intensity.

In drawing parallels between McGilchrist's neuropsychiatric fable of the struggle between the right and left brain and Blake's mythopoieic dramatization of the struggle between imagination and reason, Tweedy emphasizes that "the pathological nature of [rationality's] contemporary form needs to be recognized" so that it can be let go.¹⁰⁵

Tweedy reads Blake's later visionary poems as a psychopompic *via negativa*, to meet and forgive the "egoic personality," but cautions that the goal is not simply reintegration of the divided mind but direct perception of the ego structure:

...this... consummation devoutly to be wished... can only occur after, and not before, the dysfunctional nature of the divided Urizenic activities and egoic personality are recognised and confronted. It is here where Blake's thought provides such insight and fire. For it was to the revelation and description of this psychological process of reintegration that Blake devoted the larger part of his later life: it is the underlying theme of *The Four Zoas*, and forms the narrative spine for both *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. (Tweedy 234)

Recognizing modern rationality as spectral (or ocular) Tweedy argues, is the key to undoing the modern bar on flow: "Central to this process of awakening and of casting off the false and divided form of selfish reasoning that man has developed and inherited is the recognition of what Blake terms the 'Reasoning Spectre'" (235).

Tweedy refers to lines from *Jerusalem* that emphasize not simply the rejection, but the reclamation, of the cold Spectre, by casting it into the fires of imagination, and opening it to emotion or "Divine Mercy." To do this, in oneself, Blake implies, is to awaken from a brutal history, or "from Slumbers of Six Thousand Years":

Awake Albion awake! reclaim thy Reasoning Spectre.
Subdue Him to the Divine Mercy. Cast him down into the Lake
Of Los, that ever burneth with fire, ever & ever Amen!
Let the Four Zoas's awake from Slumbers of Six Thousand Years

¹⁰⁵ This involves an inversion not only of Kant but also of Freud. As Tweedy points out, for Freud the unconscious to be made conscious (for the sake of a healthy ego) is the repository of promiscuous, interdicted desires. By contrast, for Blake, the ego itself is unconscious or asleep, a repressive "Covering Cherub" that precludes etho-ecological interrelation, breeding distorted desire or "reptiles of the mind" (MHH).

(J 39:10)

Citing *Jerusalem*, Tweedy further emphasizes Blake's association of Urizen with spectrality:

... it is the Reasoning Power
An *Abstract objecting power*, that Negatives every thing
This is the Spectre of Man, the Holy Reasoning Power
And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation.
(J 10:13–16; emphasis added)

Blake, like Whitehead, explicitly notes the violence of scientific materialism, which abstracts and purifies, or “Negatives”¹⁰⁶ the world of fluent interrelations. Tweedy comments: “the unexpected use of the word ‘holy’ here... exposes... the pontificating of so many recent high priests of science” (235).

In Blake, when the spectral “Rational Power” views the body as a “Worm” rather than a divine “Human Form,” the implication is that the bounded rational subject, foreclosed to interrelation, is in fact worm-like (a self-involved continuum that only grows, hideously, with time).¹⁰⁷ Ironically, then, it is the disembodied Spectre itself that produces this “False Body” or “incrustation”:¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Tweedy notes: “The Reasoning Power, divided from its original bodily sources and imaginative roots, sets itself up as ‘God’ to the disconnected world it now seeks to rule over. However, in such a situation it inevitably becomes not a deity but a ‘Spectre’” (236).

¹⁰⁷ In *Milton*, Los “became what he beheld.” In a letter (to Revd. Dr. Trusler, 1799), Blake wrote, “As a man is, So he Sees.” In *Jerusalem* (Plate 34 [38], E 179) Blake writes, “contracting our infinite senses / We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one.”

¹⁰⁸ Tweedy's concise account of Blake's view of modern rationality as spectral draws on S. Foster Damon's explanation of how the Spectre, split from its Emanation, cuts itself off from the capacity for sympathy, or, as I have argued, sanitizes sympathy (in the mode of Adam Smith) of its etho-ecological implications, instituting a modern sensationalist psychology. As Tweedy explains, for Blake the Spectre, in its proscription of sympathy or relation, *is* the Selfhood:

As Damon comments, the Spectre denotes the “compulsive machinery” of the fallen rational mind... “being separated from its Emanation, the Spectre is completely unable to sympathize with any other person” (J 53:25; 88:10), and therefore becomes the self-centred Selfhood. This identification with the Selfhood reveals the Spectre's true nature” (Damon). Indeed the two are so closely bound together and entwined within the fallen psyche (the brain of man) that it is sometimes hard to distinguish

I am your Rational Power O Albion & that Human Form
You call Divine, is but a Worm seventy inches long ...
So spoke the Spectre to Albion. (J 29:5–17)

Tweedy links Blake's notion of "the Selfhood as a 'false Body'" (238) to one of his most recurrent metaphors, that of the growth of the self-contracted worm to the "final 'Dragon' form," an image of greed and self-involvement: "the rationalising Selfhood is completely hardened or incrustated, 'Coverd with precious stones' (J 89: 10)" (241). In Blake another name for this dragon, Tweedy suggests, is Satan, which "refers not to a real person but to a real State" (242).¹⁰⁹ Speculative feminists such as Haraway and Stengers might call this real state (writ large) Capitalism, the ecocidal state of "I want! I want!" depicted in an illustration for *The Gates of Paradise*. For Tweedy, this image indicates a "free-wheeling left hemisphere" because it links compulsive, ravenous consumerism with a desire for absolute psychological security or absolute identity (a want *for* I). Ironically, grasping at identity *intensifies* insecurity by preventing relationship:

Whilst on the surface, therefore, the left hemisphere frequently appears optimistic, positive, and "up", its underlying emotion is fear, disquiet, anxiety, and terror.... The culture of wanting, of consuming (that is to say the basis of contemporary "pragmatic" economic and political debate), is directly hard-wired into this rather "schizophrenic" and deeply dysfunctional pathology, in which periodic voting, like shopping, momentarily secures the addict's relief. (245)

Tweedy further clarifies, following Damon, that what the Spectre, or intellect, actually craves is reunion with its Emanation, or relational feeling (Wordsworth's "feeling intellect"). Reiterating his interest in Damon's remark that "being separated from its Emanation, the Spectre is completely unable to sympathize with any other person," he implies that the misguided craving of the modern

between Spectre and Selfhood. And as such they appear in Blake: "So spoke the Spectre to Albion. he is the Great Selfhood" (J 29:17). (236-7)

¹⁰⁹ For Blake, he clarifies, the only means to forgiveness is to learn to tell "States" from human beings, or to recognize that embodied psychological beings "travel" through states that do not finally define them: "Learn therefore O Sisters to distinguish the Eternal Human ... from those States or Worlds in which the Spirit travels: / This is the only means to Forgiveness of Enemies" (J 49:72–75). Tweedy comments, "This is the point: to 'distinguish the Eternal Human' from those States through which we all pass" (243).

consumerist subject is actually for emotional relation rather than material possession: “As Damon brilliantly notices, speaking of the Urizenic ‘Spectre’ within man, ‘his craving is for the lost Emanation’ (Damon, p. 381)... ‘Man divided from his Emanation is a dark Spectre His Emanation is an ever-weeping melancholy Shadow’ [J 53:25–26]. (247-8)

Trenchantly, Tweedy remarks that the “slow realisation of the actual insanity of the contemporary mind is one of the most disturbing elements of Blake’s whole output” (249), citing lines reiterated throughout *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*: “The Spectre is in every man insane & most / Deformd” (FZ i.103)... “Thou knowest that the Spectre is in Every Man insane brutish / Deformd” (FZ vii: 302–303)... “The Spectre is, in Giant Man; insane, and most deform’d” (J 37:4). Yet, the hopeful fact is that this deformed mode of perception is temporal rather than eternal. It cannot destroy, but only close itself from, the “Divine Body” or the “Imagination.” Arguably, one of the reasons it is so difficult to articulate what the romantics meant by the term imagination is precisely that imagination, for them, is the “Divine” or etho-ecological “Body” that lies outside the “steel” Ratio of modern optics:

The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man; & when separated
From Imagination, and closing itself as in steel, in a Ratio
Of the Things of Memory. It thence frames Laws & Moralities
To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body [J 74:10]

Whether one speaks of the left and right brain, spectre and emanation, or sensationalism and relationism, the point is that etho-ecological sympathy is the excluded middle term, the shared affective ground for a coherent sense of self.¹¹⁰ Drawing on Iain McGilchrist, Tweedy argues (in

¹¹⁰ With McGilchrist, Tweedy affords ontological primacy to the “more emotionally rich perspective of the right hemisphere,” on the grounds that it both “starts the process of bringing the world into being” but is also “more in touch with reality.” Tweedy directly links Blakean “Imagination” with “the intuitive, empathic, emotionally rich, bodily world of the right hemisphere” (251-2).

ways that affirm the basic validity and health of the intuitive, and relational, sense of being a self) that affect gives rise to “self-awareness,” or that self-awareness arises out of flow:

It is the right hemisphere, McGilchrist observes, “which is responsible for ‘maintaining a coherent, continuous and unified sense of self’” (M&E 88)... As recent research into split brains has suggested, far from not having any sense of self, the right brain is the source of self. Thus, for example, Roger Sperry and his colleagues have “hypothesised that it is a right-hemisphere network that gives rise to self-awareness” (ibid., p. 88). But in order to access this alternate sense of who one really is, the individual must let go of the ego... Blake refers to this process of letting go of the Selfhood as a “casting off”: Each Man is in his Spectre’s power Untill the arrival of that hour When his Humanity awake And cast his Spectre into the Lake [J 41, illustration].

In this context, Blake disorients and disrupts not subjectivity or the felt experience of relational selfhood, but juridical consciousness or the Spectre (the abstract notion of pure identity). Convincingly, Tweedy suggests (in ways that resonate strongly with Lussier’s reading of Blake’s mirror-dynamics) that it was to challenge the policing function of consciousness that, at specific moments, Blake refrained from engraving the plate in reverse handwriting, so that the printed text would appear backwards to the reader:

Intriguingly, Blake writes this enigmatic and powerful quatrain in reverse handwriting, in an illustration to Plate 41 of Jerusalem, and as such it does not appear in many textual reprints of the poem. Perhaps this suggests that man is not ready to read this writing, or that in order to read it one must look at things in a slightly different way, as it were back to front. One must “awake”: from the state of what is normally called “consciousness”, but which is also a profound state of unconsciousness, of sleep-walking...

Tweedy’s close reading of Blake reveals, provocatively, that the “ego” (as that which limits sympathy) tends to ascribe to itself a core of natural sweetness. In that sense, Blake’s “Dragon” perceives itself as the guardian of the very treasure it proscribes:

What is stopping this process, as always, is the “ego”: the hardening Selfhood, the covering Cherub, the rationalising Angel. Thus was the Covering Cherub reveald majestic image Of Selfhood, Body put off, the Antichrist accused Coverd with precious stones, a Human Dragon terrible ... His Head dark, deadly, in its Brain incloses a reflexion Of Eden all perverted [J 89:10–15]. Here again we meet the real “Dragon” of the human brain, the actual rather than the PR form of divided rationality. Blake specifically locates this Urizenic Dragon within the “Brain”, and within the brain of the Dragon itself is reflected a memory of a reality

that it has long ago cut itself off from: “Eden”... But it is a void, and it knows it. It is presented as “Covering”, but it conceals and guards the entrance to the garden, which is imagination. (265-6)

A final point to consider is Tweedy’s account of Blake’s dramatic recasting of the last judgment as an ending of cold obstructive judgment that can occur in each and every moment:

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years. For in this Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great Events of Time start forth & are conceivd in such a period Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery. [Mil 28:62–63, 29:1–3]

History is figured here as a body in which time moves as arterial pulsations. Each heartbeat lasts, or equals, six thousand years (all of recorded history). A poet’s work is done, Blake suggests, in the event of feeling (“the moment in each day that Satan cannot find”), the indeterminacy (intensivity, fluency) of which escapes the determinacy (extensivity, punctuality) of the mechanical heartbeat. Poetic sympathy opens into view an “impossible history” (Makdisi). “A tear,” is in this sense “an intellectual thing” because it feels, and forgives, the cycle of human history. Equally, a tear’s intelligence exceeds the social construction of sensation.

Poignantly, the actual painting *A Vision of the Last Judgment* – sketched and described by Blake’s *Descriptive Catalogue* for an intended 1810 exhibition – is a lost artwork. The exhibition never took place, due to the failure of an independent exhibition that Blake managed to stage in his brother’s haberdashery shop in 1809 – plagued by low attendance, lack of sales, and a negative review, Hunt’s infamous description of Blake as an unfortunate madman in *The Examiner*. In effect, *A Vision of the Last Judgment* has become a moment in Blake that criticism cannot find. Based on earlier designs, and from the detailed notes in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, it is still possible to speculate about the full intentions of the ambitious piece. Tweedy explains its iconographic inversion of traditional tropes of feeling and judgment, and its recasting of “pure” reason (rather than the promiscuous “passions”) as that which bars one from heaven:

As with traditional representations of the Last Judgment, Blake visually portrays this process as an event occurring between the left and the right, although again he radically reinterprets the meaning of these terms. Being holy, obedient, moral, and pure were usually considered (in the Urizenic universe governed by the God of Reason) as qualities that got you into heaven, and upon which the soul was judged accordingly. This rationalistic assumption goes back at least as far as ancient Egypt, and the “weighing” of the soul after death. In subsequent Christian art the “righteous” were depicted on the “right” of the Logos (Christos), awaiting their “ascension” into the “up” world of left-hemispheric heaven. However, *Blake suggests that it is precisely these qualities that psychologically bar you from entering the kingdom, the Now*. “Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have < curbed & > Governed their Passions or have No Passions but because they have Cultivated their Understandings. The Treasures of Heaven are not Negations of Passion but Realities of Intellect from which All the Passions Emanate < Uncurbed > in their Eternal Glory” (VL 87). Whereas for Plato and other rationalists (including Freud), “Passion” was a chaotic and obstinate horse that had to be whipped, bridled, and negated as far as possible (“purified”), *in the integrated individual the Passions are the divine emanations of Being itself*. A “Last Judgment” is necessary, Blake observes, not only to stop the continual moralising in the head that shuts off heaven, but to stop the moralisers and the moralising programs from hindering and obstructing the true nature of imaginative existence, which is delivered through the right hemisphere.

Holiness is not The Price of Entrance into Heaven Those who are
 cast out Are All Those who having no Passions of their own because
 No Intellect. Have spent their lives in Curbing & Governing other
 Peoples by the Various arts of Poverty & Cruelty of all kinds Wo Wo
 Wo to you Hypocrites [LJ 87]
 (273)

Again, for Blake the purpose of the last judgment is not to “purify” modern rational agents but to undo the violence *of* their discourses of purity:

It is to prevent this “Curbing & Governing” of the imaginative, forgiving faculty within Man that the Last Judgment comes within the brain of Man. As Blake notes, “A Last Judgment is not for the purpose of making Bad Men better but for the Purpose of hindering them from oppressing the Good with Poverty & Pain by means of Such Vile Arguments & Insinuations” (LJ 85).

To conclude this discussion of Blake and Wordsworth’s understanding of experience as relational rather than sensational, it seems apposite to recall, with Tweedy, the contraction of an etho-ecological body into a bounded body:

As we have seen, Blake prefigures this world as a “War of Blood” in which every living thing lives “by Devouring”: “A Creation that groans, living on Death” (J 50: 5–9, p. 199). “Adam”, who was actually “a comparatively late episode in the general fall of man (Albion)”,

is a materialisation or form of natural consciousness that sees itself as being part of this macrocosm, “inside” it (Damon, p. 4). In this condition “the exterior world is Man, separated from him by the Division which was the Fall” (Damon, 1924, p. 390)....

As Frye remarks of this *esse est percipi* dimension to Blake’s thought, “when the present body of man was achieved, the universe necessarily appeared to that body in its present shape. Its present shape is a stabilizing of the object world, made permanent on a basis of ‘mathematic form’ or mechanical order. Therefore the creation of the present body of man must have been part of this stabilization” (Frye, 1947, pp. 129– 130). (279-280)

Yet, if it is the worldview of Bacon-Newton-Locke that consolidates this split into *both* Adam (the contracted body) and Satan (disembodied reason), Blake does not hate this worldview. Adam and Satan are, for him, “limits” mercifully set in place to stop the modern fall into the void, or into the view that subjectivity is a pure fiction. These limits of contraction are not entirely nihilistic then, but are still very painful to inhabit. In that sense, Blake is not hostile to secularism, but, like Whitehead, opposed to the secular repudiation of metaphysics and policing of a “camouflaged metaphysics.” For Blake, this disavowed metaphysics is a “false religion,”¹¹¹ a worship of abstraction by modern individuals who sever themselves from etho-ecological experience.

7 Morton and Blake: “infinity on this side of reality”

In venturing a speculative feminist reading of Blake, this study will gradually move toward readings of the second-generation romantics, including Mary Shelley, and Emily Dickinson, as

¹¹¹ He also calls it a “devil” in that it provides the false metaphysics, or warped philosophical basis, for egotism: “Devils are False Religions” (“To the Christians,” Jerusalem, f. 77.).

poets who took romantic haptics in radical directions.¹¹² Consequently, this section on Blake will culminate with a contrast between Blake's and Dickinson's "becoming-insect" poems. With that in mind, I begin by noting modern critical theory's tendency to convert Blake's "divinest sense" into "common sense" or stark, secular skepticism. Blake's caustic voice has been too easily appropriated by a hermeneutics of suspicion, which reduces the metaphysical element either to politics – an "antinomian" working class (Makdisi) resistance to "liberal-radicals" – or to negative critique. These contexts for Blake scholarship may greatly enrich a less mythologized understanding of Blake as a culture agent, but lack a means of addressing his vision of an alternative modernity.

By the phrase "alternative modernity," I refer to a modernity that asks us to rethink the metaphysical or "mystic" less as essentialism¹¹³ and escapism and more as "firmer trust" (Wordsworth) or radical return to lived intuition. Hence, when a dark ecologist like Morton attempts to respect a decentered alien nonhuman universe by exposing the illusions of aesthetic subjectivity, and the image of "Nature" it produces, these moves may seem Blakean, but a disjunction appears between poststructuralist modernity and postsecular, etho-ecological modernity. Blake rejects the image of creation, or "vegetative" nature as perceived through the centered optics of "the Selfhood," but in the same breath declares the living universe "human" and

¹¹² Having introduced Dickinson, perhaps anomalously from the point of view of period studies, I have no intention of presenting her as ornamental to a discussion of male British Romantics. Instead, I hope to suggest tacit links between Shelley and Dickinson, as female poets who play with and deeply question a gothic optics of life-in-death (the "starkest madness" of common sense), subverting it with an etho-ecological haptics (the "much madness" of "divinest sense").

¹¹³ To assert that things have "no essence" might make sense in a soteriological paradigm, like Buddhism, which points past reified experience to nonconceptual attention to the nature of awareness itself, but becomes nihilistic in an intellectual and materialist context.

asks that we awake *because* “everything that lives is holy.”¹¹⁴ This movement from “Error” or “Creation” to reality (or in Otto’s terms, this breaching of the “image” by “relationship”) is a movement not toward transcendence (inattention to the world in favor of the idea of a higher reality) but toward intensivity, which radically attends to the world.

Admittedly, Morton is always clearly in pursuit of just this sort of intimacy with the world, as implied in his phrase “ecology without nature” (as well as his concepts, in *The Ecological Thought*, of the “the mesh” and “the strange stranger”). In ways that resonate with constructivist etho-ecology, Morton attempts to think across the science-humanities divide – joining materialism and poststructuralism – via the “the radical openness of the ecological thought” (EC 11). At the same time, alluding to Blake, he expresses his wariness of any easy “fit” between science and the humanities, emphasizing instead, the “warmth and strangeness, infinity and proximity,” of an “ecological thought” that he finds active as much in Darwinian evolution (which “humiliated” the

¹¹⁴ In *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake paints a rather dire of situation of the “new world” (America) or of modernity, torn between a raped and impure “feminine” awareness of interrelationality and “god-tormented” “masculine” insistence on self. A scorned Oothoon sings (or rather “wails”) “every morning” to a gloomy puritanical Theotormon, in apparently vain efforts to persuade him that a self-centered eye misses out on the ever-available fact that life is full of bliss and that “everything that lives is holy”:

‘Does the sun walk, in glorious raiment, on the secret floor
Where the cold miser spreads his gold; or does the bright cloud drop
On his stone threshold? Does his eye behold the beam that brings
Expansion to the eye of pity; or will he bind himself
Beside the ox to thy hard furrow? Does not that mild beam blot
The bat, the owl, the glowing tiger, and the king of night?
The sea-fowl takes the wintry blast for a cov’ring to her limbs,
And the wild snake the pestilence to adorn him with gems and gold;
And trees, and birds, and men behold their eternal joy.
Arise, you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!
Arise, and drink your bliss, for everything that lives is holy!’
Thus every morning wails Oothoon; but Theotormon sits
Upon the morgin’d ocean conversing with shadows dire.
(*Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 204-216)

human by bringing it into shocking intimacy with inanimate and nonhuman material processes) as in Derridean deconstruction (which “humiliated” the human by registering material difference in excess of the mastering center):

The ecological thought affects all aspects of life, culture, and society. Aside from art and science, we must build the ecological thought from what we find in philosophy, history, sociology, anthropology, religion, cultural studies, and critical theory. I shall combine empirical evolution theory with “Continental” thinking about being and existence. This seems perverse: “high” philosophy merging shamelessly with “vulgar” materialism. There are pretty good boundaries between science and humanities departments and within the humanities themselves. This won’t be to everyone’s taste. Daniel Dennett, a Darwinist cognition theorist, pooh-poohs deconstruction. Much Continental thinking assumes that there is no continuity between humans and animals, adopting a haughty “everyone knows that” tone and declaring that thinking otherwise is “asinane” (worse than asinine— and worse because we’re behaving like donkeys). This is condescending exclusivity. Some insist proudly that they “refuse to accept the theory of evolution,” which to a biologist sounds like refusing to accept that the Earth is round. Even creationists take evolution more seriously than that. It doesn’t have to be like this. No less a figure than Derrida maintained that deconstruction was a form of radical empiricism.

Taken at their trivial and ideological worst, the humanities is hamstrung by “factoids,” quasi- or pseudofacts that haven’t been well thought out, while the sciences are held in the sway of unconscious “opinions.” Humanities and sciences hold broken pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, pieces that might not fit together. *Like William Blake I’m suspicious of “fitting & fitted.”* The ecological thought must interrogate both the attitude of science, its detached authoritarian coldness; and the nihilistic, baselessly anthropocentric arguments in the humanities as well as humanist refusals to see the big picture, often justified by self-limiting arguments against “totalization”— talk about shooting yourself in the foot. The ecological thought is about warmth and strangeness, infinity and proximity, tantalizing “thereness” and head-popping, wordless openness. (ET 11-12; emphasis added)

Tying these issues to the etho-ecological issues at stake in the science-humanities divide, Morton explains (along Latourian lines) that the ecological crisis has poked a hole in our psychological bubble, forcing us to “think big” or to see what interconnectedness really implies: the fact that we are “enmeshed.” This awareness (“the ecological thought”) involves the loss of “ontic” reference

points,¹¹⁵ a loss of “Nature” or holistic connection, the “fantasies” of ecological rhetoric that he describes, along Zizekian lines, as a schizophrenic attempt to bandage over “the total nature of the catastrophe” (32). Driving this posthumanist point home, Morton compares Wordsworth to Blake:

The mesh must be made of very interesting material indeed. It isn’t “organic,” in the sense of form fitting function. William Wordsworth wanted to show how the organic world was “fitted” to the mind, and vice versa. The theory of evolution, the basis of the ecological thought, does use words such as “fittest” and “adaptation,” but it doesn’t imply that bald heads exist because of piles of filth. *Darwin would have concurred with the poet William Blake, who wrote in the margins of his copy of Wordsworth at those precise lines about fitting, “You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted . . . & please your lordship.”* (ET 30; emphasis added)

Morton repeatedly alludes to Blake to illustrate the etho-ecological “paradox” of the ecological thought – for which what the human loses in terms of its special status *in*, it gains in intimacy *with*, the flows of decentered matter. *Auguries of Innocence*, for instance, in its seamless alternations between a cry in the name of infinite matter and a cry in the name of subjects (humans, animals), exemplifies for Morton the ways in which “the mesh,” in its uncanny undoing of forms of intellectual and aesthetic difference, and of the bar between the finite and the infinite, is intimate (personal, tender). In other words, he seems to suggest that, like Blake, his brand of ecocritique makes the human more by making it less, undoing Nature and Self but not on behalf of a “thrilling, infinitely plastic post-Thing out there”:

Infinity implies intimacy: “To see a world in a grain of sand . . . Hold infinity in the palm of your hand” (Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*, lines 1– 3). Immediately following this cry of the heart, Blake’s poem flips between animal cruelty and social misery. That’s the paradox of the ecological thought: “A dog starv’d at his master’s gate / Predicts the ruin of

¹¹⁵ “The more we become aware of the dangers of ecological instability— extinctions, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, starvation— the more we find ourselves lacking a reference point. When we think big we discover a hole in our psychological universe. There is no way of measuring anything anymore, since there is nowhere ‘outside’ this universe from which to take an impartial measurement. Strangely, thinking big doesn’t mean that we put everything in a big box. Thinking big means that the box melts into nothing in our hands. We’re losing the very ground under our feet. In philosophical language, we’re not just losing ‘ontological’ levels of meaningfulness. We’re losing the “ontic,” the actual physical level we trusted for so long.” (ET 31)

the state” (lines 9–10). Blake shows us infinity on this side of reality, not “over yonder” in some abstract ideal realm. The ecological thought concerns itself with personhood, for want of a better word. Up close, the ecological thought has to do with warmth and tenderness; hospitality, wonder, and love; vulnerability and responsibility. *Although the ecological thought is a form of reductionism*, it must be personal, since it refrains from adopting a clinical, intellectual, or aesthetic (sadistic) distance. Believing in an ineffable Nature or Self is wrong. But so is claiming that there is a thrilling, infinitely plastic post-Thing out there waiting to be completely manipulated. Both the Nature people and the post-Nature people have it in for, well, people. The ecological thought is about people— it is people. (77; emphasis added)

Here, Morton seems to make polemical and moralistic blanket statements, asserting that “Believing in an ineffable Nature or Self is wrong,” and implying that aesthetics involve “sadistic” distance or detached reflection. Yet his larger point about “infinity on this side of reality” points, crucially, to the need to attend to actual existence rather than to broad abstractions such as Nature and Post-Nature. He registers the haptic in Blake as “touch” or tenderness that finds value rather than danger in bare facts.

For Morton, the real danger is the illusion of an out-there from which we are exempted, the consoling fantasies that allow us to ignore the outrage of institutional violence against powerless creatures (robins, horses, children).¹¹⁶ Yet, though he shares Blake’s loathing for abstraction, Morton emphasizes radical alterity in ways Blake and Wordsworth would not. His dark ecology may be active and compositional, but it lies closer to *natura naturata* than *natura naturans*. For Morton the haptic “infinity” to which Blake points is not relational but digital.¹¹⁷ “Our slogan should be dislocation, dislocation, dislocation” (ET 28).

¹¹⁶ As I have mentioned, Morton’s version of speculative realism lies closer to Graham Harman’s object-oriented ontology than to aesthetic ontology in the vein of Whitehead and Deleuze. (Steven Shaviro, whose blogs are rife with commentary on Harman - in a kind of oppositional true friendship - is perhaps the most interesting analogue to Morton). Like Harman, Morton insistently critiques aesthetic ontologies of “relation” as a kind of oozing vitalism that still gives humans a cool and distanced place, or as a kind of “Beulah” that Blake rejected long before Morton.

¹¹⁷ He also critiques Heidegger’s ontic notion of “earth.”

Invoking the three ecologies, Morton hints that Darwin's "amazement" at this radical, digital intimacy is far more important than efforts to provide another complacent metaphysics:

The ecological thought stirs because the mesh appears in our social, psychic, and scientific domains. Since everything is interconnected, there is no definite background and therefore no definite foreground. Darwin sensed the mesh while pondering the implications of natural selection.

You can detect Darwin's amazement... Every single life form is literally familiar: we're genetically descended from them. Darwin imagines an endlessly branching tree. In contrast, mesh doesn't suggest a clear starting point, and those "clusters" of "subordinate groups" are far from linear (they "cannot be ranked in a single file"). Each point of the mesh is both the center and edge of a system of points, so there is no absolute center or edge." (28-9)

For Morton, modernity has entered a moment when the psychological universe has been pierced, and when all minds are faced with this uncanny familiarity. Infernal and caustic in the Blakean sense,^{xxxv} his dark ecology reveals that the apparent surface of modernity has already been eaten away. Yet, though both Morton and Blake are concerned with new intimacy with what speaks from outside language, for the former this speech is literally demonic (sheer alterity) while for the latter what seems demonic is actually the voice of interrelation.

When the unidentified voice that introduces Blake's *Milton* insists, repeatedly, "Mark well my words! They are of your eternal salvation," it is, uncannily, as if the unthought is speaking to thought. Its "marks" (literally made by Blake) come from outside modernity. It is the haptic speaking to the optic. In this context, the phrase "eternal salvation" as Blake uses it is as irreducible to a theological explanation as it is to a critical explanation. Clearly, this Blakean voice from outside modernity intends the phrase "eternal salvation" in a perverse sense – i.e., analogizing the modern condition to a state of fallen perception or hellish isolation.

When Blake writes, "Establishment of Truth depends on destruction of Falsehood continually" (*Jerusalem* 55:65, E205), he implies that knowledge must be continually undone in

moment-to-moment, intensive attention. In that sense, knowledge *is* negation, because it freezes movement and expels relation. In writing that “less than all cannot satisfy man” (*There Is No Natural Religion*), he points to the fact that when attention or energy is not barred, it naturally flows in intensive or etho-ecological interrelation.

8 *There Is No Natural Religion: Blake and the Modern Contract*

Isaiah answered: "I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discovered the infinite in everything, and as I was then persuaded, and remain confirmed, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote." (MHH)

Why bother insisting that all things flow? One might turn the question around by pointing out that empiricist thinkers such as Locke, Hume, and Smith circumscribed and proscribed sympathy, advancing a logic that doubts etho-ecological flow. Blake called this logic “War”: a violent epistemology that repudiates metaphysical interrelation. Hume, one of the last great consolidators of empiricism, wandered toward the “sceptical conclusion” that “[t]here is no perception of a particular by an actual entity” (Whitehead). Blake’s response to this doubt in lived experience is comic and immediate: “If the Sun and Moon should doubt / They’d immediately go

out” (*Auguries of Innocence* 19-20).¹¹⁸ First I will touch on the Smithian circumscription of sympathy, before passing into a discussion of Blake’s satirical rejection of this optics of finitude – which, in Laura Quinney’s terms, asserts the self (epistemology) but denies the soul (metaphysics) – in *There is No Natural Religion*.

i. “Our senses will never inform us” (Adam Smith and the devaluation of reality)

One name for the modern proscription of sympathy is, simply, the “modern contract” (Whitehead), a doctrine of “sensationalism” instituted via the Lockean division of experience into “reflection” (“culture”) and “sensation” (“nature”). This bifurcation of experience was important to British culture, at least since the seventeenth century, as a means of preserving and justifying a distinction between the leisure class and working class. While the former possessed refined, rational sensibilities, the latter were susceptible to animal passions. In Adam Smith’s *Treatise on Human Nature*, for instance, it becomes crucial to radically separate proportional or properly judged “sympathy” (refined reflective feeling) from “extravagant” or excessively imaginative “enthusiasm” (brute corporeal stimulation). Such corporeal excitements, since Shaftesbury, were imagined by the British leisure class in terms of the brutish passions of working bodies: “mob”

¹¹⁸ As Peter Otto has suggested, Blake's primary aim is to "breach" the abstract "image of thought" (Deleuze) with living imagination, or with "image-affectations" that "present external bodies as present in us" (SPP 48). For Blake, natural religion is no religion at all, but a dogmatic metaphysics rooted in a "sensationalist myth" (Whitehead) that binds body and mind in a dull round of instrumental actions that he called "Satanic mills" or "biopsychological" units of production (Makdisi). Socially constituted persons become the reproductive units of a modern optics of curbed sensation ("Satan's Mathematik Holiness"). When Blake, like Wordsworth, speaks of rousing us from our sleep of death, this "death" is none other than Urizenic codification.

passions that were contagious and promiscuous.¹¹⁹ The irony, and contradiction, of course, is that British aesthetic philosophy, from Shaftesbury to Smith, grounds its culture of sensibility *in* natural feeling.¹²⁰ Sympathy is demarcated from enthusiasm as a form of refined reflective sensibility, or educated feeling, in contrast to contagious passions (unnatural excitement by foreign and deracinated ideas that infect bodies) that violate social feeling.

In Smith, this ground of social feeling is explicitly an economic rather than organic or ecological ground. Smithian sympathy requires an economy of self-discipline. In effect, Smith's treatise sanitizes "sympathy" of affects that exceed self-interest or atomistic individuality. Sympathy must explicitly be curbed by reason, on the grounds that it is a "feminine" indulgence rooted in weak logic.¹²¹

In "Adam Smith on Women," Maureen Harkin clarifies that Smith grew to increasingly rely on his notion of the "impartial spectator" as a faculty of judgment presumed to be stronger in men than in women: "Smith makes clear that... this self-regulation tends to be more vigorous in male

¹¹⁹ I refer to the "history of feeling" traced by romanticists such as Goodman, Favret, Burgess, Jackson, Morton, Pinch, Esterhammer, and Bewell.

¹²⁰ One can hardly resist asking how natural feelings are to be differentiated from animal passions or mere sensations. The answer may lie in a tendency of British emotionalists to consider enthusiasms to be artificial or unnatural stimulations, resulting from the increasingly rapid transport of information. In that sense, stimulations are not properly feelings at all but exciting impingements of foreign, deracinated information, which, according to thinkers such as Shaftesbury and Burke, violates the natural, organic fabric of social feeling.

¹²¹ "In the suitableness or unsuitableness, in the proportion or disproportion which the affection seems to bear to the cause or object which excites it, consists the propriety or impropriety, the decency or ungracefulness of the consequent action.... When we judge in this manner of any affection, as proportioned or dispro-portioned to the cause which excites it, it is scarce possible that we should make use of any other rule or canon but the correspondent affection in ourselves. If, upon bringing the case home to our own breast, we find that the sentiments which it gives occasion to, coincide and tally with our own, we necessarily approve of them as proportioned and suitable to their objects; if otherwise, we necessarily disapprove of them, as extravagant and out of proportion. Every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them." (Smith, I.i.3 to I.i.4, 13-14)

than in female subjects, and portrays women as gripped by a kind of impulsiveness that prevents the kind of rational calculation that this type of truly ethical practice requires” (*The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith* 502). Smith implicitly casts sympathy as effeminate and extravagant, requiring masculine, rational restraint. He famously asserts that “Humanity is the virtue of a woman, generosity of a man” (TMC, IV.2.10 190) in order to contrast the feminine ineffectuality of mere sympathy (emotional giving) with the masculine and heroic self-disciplined act of social propriety (material giving). Harkin comments,

Smith’s argument... is that in the scene of distress, the onlooker’s tendency to respond with sympathy for another’s pain is commendable, but uncomplicated and often ineffectual, and he strongly associates this unmediated, more or less spontaneous response with women. The effort made by the object of sympathy, the sufferer, is more complex, calling for heroic efforts of self-restraint and requiring him to modulate his own suffering in order that the observer might come close to matching it. (*The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith* 517)

Harkin further clarifies that the “impartial spectator” is brought in to mark the difference between “masculine generosity and feminine sympathy”:

The impartial spectator plays a crucial role in TMS, and one progressively expanded in later editions of the book. Initially introduced to solve the problem of distinguishing truly ethical from merely popular decision... the impartial spectator constitutes a third, and privileged spectator in the scene of sympathy. He is the ideal observer, who sees correctly what kind of response a given situation or event actually warrants, because free of the immediate self-concern or partiality either [sic] observed or observer, and the presence or absence of this figure is the defining difference between masculine generosity and feminine sympathy. (517)

Sympathy, for Smith, is “apt to offend by its excess” (TMS VI.ii.i.20: 226) and “apparently functions without reference to an impartial spectator, one who would make clear the need to moderate such powerful reactions” (518). Harkin points out that Smith’s identification of sympathy with a feminine tendency toward extravagance and imaginative transport “echoes a familiar scenario from contemporary discourse on the novel and its female audience, a discourse

which habitually, dwelt on the extreme suggestibility of such female readers and the threat to self-restraint and social order that such undisciplined feelings posed” (518).

Women, who sympathize to an excess, trespass on social reality *because*, for Smith, sympathy is, in the first place, an imaginative act – one that has utility but should not be indulged. Carried too far, that beneficial fantasy becomes a dangerous delusion. Smith argues that, logically, feelings cannot be shared:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. (Smith, I.1 4)

Clearly, there is overt contradiction in Smith between an *anxiety* about sympathy and imagination as genuinely affective (or as intuitions of a shared, porous etho-ecological ground), and a move to gesture away that anxiety by redefining both as acts of representation that ought not, in a sanely functioning mind and body, be mistaken for real experiences: “Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, *our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations.*” He reduces sympathy to the rational calculation of a private psychological field, modulated by the impartial spectator, which imagines only as speculation or on the basis of projection from private experience. Sympathy’s real purpose is to enable one to maintain one’s self-interest by responding to others in appropriately “social” ways, or in ways that do not violate the principle of self-interest.¹²²

¹²² Sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, in Smith’s account of sympathy as psychological projection, is the notion that “weak” people and “weak” organs lead one to an “extravagance” of feeling, or

Excessive sympathy is not only weak logic, it is bad hygiene: it pollutes the atomism of rational individuals. An experience of interrelation in excess of those sanitary discourses that shape the subject of feeling is a threat to reason and to the body politic. One of the functions of social discourses, then, is to police the body. Such discourses aim to maintain the purity of a body that might otherwise prove promiscuous. The real threat, one might say, are promiscuous passions that threaten an imperialist model of what counts as alive, human, or rational.

ii. “For man has closed himself up”¹²³ ... “a poor mortal vegetation / Beneath the moon of Ulro”¹²⁴

Blake satirizes the logical consequences of the modern contract in *There Is No Natural Religion*, in the form of two parallel syllogisms that contrast sensationalism (optics) and relationism (haptics). Laura Quinney’s analysis of this early text, in *William Blake on Self and Soul*, clarifies his resistance to the "reductive account of subjective experience" produced by

“transport” beyond the limits of propriety, judgment and good sense: “For as to be in pain or distress of any kind excites the most excessive sorrow, *so to conceive or to imagine that we are in it, excites some degree of the same emotion, in proportion to the vivacity or dulness of the conception.... Persons of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body* complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent part of their own bodies. The horror which they conceive at the misery of those wretches affects that particular part in themselves more than any other; because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner. The *very force of this conception is sufficient, in their feeble frames, to produce that itching or uneasy sensation complained of. Men of the most robust make, observe that in looking upon sore eyes they often feel a very sensible soreness in their own, which proceeds from the same reason; that organ being in the strongest man more delicate, than any other part of the body is in the weakest.*” (Smith, I.1 4-5).

¹²³ *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

¹²⁴ *Milton* 24[26]:24– 25, E120

Lockean empiricism. Broadly, the haptic syllogisms in Plate B reply to the optic syllogisms in Plate A. Blake's counter-epistemological logic drives toward an ethos of caring or an etho-ecological sense of "the Infinite in all things":

Application

He who sees the In-
-finite in all things
sees God. He who
sees the Ratio only
sees himself only

To contextualize Blake's reaction to sensationalist psychology, Quinney explains how Locke's "anatomy of mental operations" imagined the mind "in materialist terms as a kind of natural organ with a fixed province and fixed processes" (Quinney 44). She cites a passage from Locke that might make Blake cringe:

In this Part [sensation] the Understanding is meerly passive; and whether or no, it will have these Beginnings, and as it were, materials of Knowledge, is not in its own power. For the Objects of our Senses do, many of them, obtrude their particular Ideas upon our minds, whether we will or no: And the Operations of our minds will not let us be without, at least, some obscure Notions of them. No Man can be wholly ignorant of what he does when he thinks. These simple Ideas, when offered to the mind, the Understanding can no more refuse to have, nor alter, when they are imprinted, nor blot them out, and make new ones it self, than a mirror can refuse, alter, or obliterate the Images or Ideas which the Objects set before it, do therein produce. (118)

Drawing on Frye, Quinney explains that Locke is "subducting mental processes that could be conceived of as active and imaginative into automatic, reflexive, unconscious ones" (FQ), in an "anatomy of mental operations" (FQ) with "almost willful emphasis on the mind's passivity" or on the reduction of the mind to the material organ of the brain. Even what Locke calls "complex ideas" (secondary and reflective rather than simple or primary) involve representations that appear automatic and involuntary:

Such are, Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing, and all the different actings of our own Minds; which we, being conscious of and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our Understandings as distinct Ideas, as we do from Bodies affecting our Senses. This Source of Ideas every Man has wholly in himself: And though it be not sense, as having nothing to do with external Objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be call'd internal Sense. (105)

What Blake is up to, then, in *There Is No Natural Religion* is an ironic subversion of an epistemic regime that severs mental experience and natural processes:

Locke conceives the *sensa* as purely mental additions to the facts of physical nature. Both [Locke and Descartes] conceive the physical world as in essential independence of the mental world, though the two worlds have ill-defined accidental relationships... [they] abandon the 'realitas objectiva' so far as *sensa* are concerned... and hope to save it so far as extensive relations are concerned. This is an impossible compromise. It was easily swept aside by Berkeley and Hume. (PR 325-6)

Whitehead comments that western thought has been muddled by this “impossible compromise”:^{xxxvi}

Anyhow, ‘representative perception’ can never, within its own metaphysical doctrines, produce the title deeds to guarantee the validity of the representation of fact by idea. Locke and the philosophers of his epoch - the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries - are misled by one fundamental misconception. It is the assumption, unconscious and uncriticized, that logical simplicity can be identified with priority in the process of constituting an experient occasion... This identification of priority in logic with priority in practice has vitiated thought and procedure from the first discovery of mathematics and logic by the Greeks. For example, some of the worst defects in educational procedure have been due to it. (PR 54)

In this context, Quinney’s focus on Blake’s response to Locke’s “fundamental misconception” helps to clarify Blake’s resistance to the modern undercutting of the subject’s capacity to trust its “desires” or instinctive interrelational tendencies – its etho-ecological prehensions.

Yet Quinney does not always quite do enough to nuance what Blake uniquely meant by certain terms, such as inspiration. To explain that Blake objected to the Lockean view of

stimulation on the grounds that it "slights, or even represses, the imaginative component of perception – what Blake calls 'the Poetic or Prophetic character,' or, more plainly, 'Inspiration and Revelation'" does little to clarify how Blake refigures a term like inspiration in ways that are less religiously transcendental than experiential. For Blake, a mechanistic naturalism leads "to the sleep of Urizen, or, 'Forgetfulness, dumbness, necessity!' (BU 10:24, E75)," or to the "same dull round over again." "Despair must be [the] eternal lot" (TNNR b, E2), Quinney suggests, of the empiricist subject, "condemned to monotony and hence to stultification." However, in arguing that for Blake "we are not confined to natural reality" (29), Quinney by default leaves us to impute an ideal or transcendental reality. She never quite offers an explanation of how inspiration and revelation open onto a life "beyond" nature:

Anyone who believes in merely Natural Man must eventually regard himself as a worm of sixty winters, or as a later prophecy puts it, "a poor mortal vegetation / Beneath the moon of Ulro" (M 24[26]:24– 25, E120). Nature will emerge as an omnipotent reality, possessed of the force of necessity, and will consequently come to seem tyrannical and malicious.

In claiming that "Blake asserts axiomatically, we are not confined to natural reality," she tends to focus on the links Blake saw between empiricism and despair, at the expense of a satisfactory explanation of Blake's "annihilation" of Selfhood. Even so, the one side she does address (the dark psychological consequences of empiricism) is lucid and worth quoting at length:

Why should empiricism have such dark psychological consequences? In *Fearful Symmetry* Northrop Frye paraphrased, with unsurpassable lucidity, what we might call the first order of Blake's critique. "Empiricism," "Natural Religion," and "Deism" exalt into an authoritative philosophical position what is actually a terrible fear haunting humankind: the fear that the natural world is the real world. Natural Religion and Deism frame this notion in religious terms by proposing that the natural world is part of the Creation, and that it therefore expresses something about the essence of God. Empirical science says more simply that material reality is the only certain, solid, and knowable reality. In Blake's argument, these claims come to the same thing and have the same dire implications. The natural world is a world of death; it contains either objects that are merely inert or subjects that are merely

short-lived phantoms. It is the world of linear time, or inexorable clock-time that brings forth living things only in order to extinguish them and replace them with others in endless, vain cycles of mortality. Saturn devours his children, as Frye points out. From the laws of nature spring necessity, and surrendering to necessity spells helplessness and despair. How dreadful for us if this is the "reality" because then we must believe that we dwell in a fundamentally hostile world, and that from it the soul will be dismissed to "Non-Entity" or "Eternal Death." (29-30)

In Quinney's account, the problem for the early nineteenth century subject was a deep conviction in the self's isolation. Here, Quinney contrasts Wordsworth, whom she takes (ignoring his postsecular, etho-ecological insistence) as "an atheist" (26) and philosopher, with Blake, whom she takes as "a political radical and a radical psychologist" (xi). In posing this contrast between the two poets, she emphasizes that "Blake's essential topic is the unhappiness of the subject within its own subjectivity, or... the loneliness of the soul" (11). Yet she also depicts Blake as, by turns, gnostic and Neoplatonic, missing his thoroughly romantic emphasis on aesthesis.

Nevertheless, what Quinney reveals in this contrast between Wordsworth, the "Natural Man," and Blake, the visionary, is the extent to which Blake refuses any mold of the nature poet. Wordsworth, she argues, provided the psychological extrapolation of Locke's philosophy to interior life, extending empirical philosophy into new areas of human subjectivity and experience. Blake, she argues, rejected the empiricism in Wordsworth's poetry in the period between 1798-1805, which critics from Levinson to Richardson consider his *least* dogmatic. As I have mentioned, she argues that Wordsworth was a Lockean psychologist until he wrote his more idealist *Immortality Ode*, unpublished until 1815. Such a reading is partially supported by the contrast between Blake's responses to *The Immortality Ode* and to *Tintern Abbey*. The diarist Crabb Robinson reports that when he read the *Immortality Ode* to Blake, he liked the Neoplatonic passages, yet, possibly thinking of the notion of "fitting and fitted" evident in *Tintern Abbey* and the *Prospectus*, later commented, "I fear Wordsworth loves nature." Quinney's interpretation is

that Blake preferred the *Immortality Ode*'s rejection of "dull and vacant" (Quinney 83) nature for a transcendental reality, or its shift from a doomed and melancholic effort at working out the subjective implications of empiricism.¹²⁵

Quinney turns to the *Book of Thel* to illustrate these issues, suggesting that "When Blake said, 'I fear Wordsworth loves Nature,' he must have meant that he feared for him because Nature worship become its own torture" (Quinney 83). She continues, "Thel's morale collapses in just this way, as her attempts to contrive a redemptive vision of natural reality fail, and she is left alone with her alienation from the insatiate mortal body" (83). For Quinney, Thel is doomed by the exposure to impinging data that materialism implies. Lockean psychology, she explains, figures the mind not only as tabula rasa but as dark closet or camera obscura a "metaphor of internment" (Quinney 34). Thel's encounter with the grave (which implies this condition of being buried alive in a world of mere sensation or life-in-death), she argues, is mirrored in Wordsworth's inadvertent exposure of the troubles with Lockean identity: the influx of impressions introduces ceaseless difference within the self. In effect, she reads *The Book of Thel* as dramatizing the vexed consequences of the "private psychology" (Whitehead) implied in Lockean sensationalism and evident in Wordsworth's "blank misgivings." Implicitly, she proposes that selfhood, grounded in secular materialism, involves a dissatisfaction remediable only by spiritual experience, or a turn to soul. Referring to an "essential uneasiness of consciousness" (85), she argues that "the intuition of selfhood has always been perplexed in theory as well as in practice" (Quinney 3).

In her reading, Blake's "penetrating psychological critique" (xii) was aimed at exposing this vexation, while Wordsworth, more the "philosopher," revealed such vexation inadvertently. Where Wordsworth advocated a "wise passiveness" as if it to avoid an unhappy sense of thralldom to

¹²⁵ It's been said that Wordsworth began in optimism and ended in pessimism, while Blake began in pessimism and ended in optimism.

matter, Blake, she argues, offered “therapeutic interventions designed to ameliorate the radical unhappiness of passivation” (99). Yet, one of the problems with her argument is that the vague solution she attributes to Blake seem equally applicable to Wordsworth — that he sought a means to “transcend empirical subjectivity and achieve freedom” (65) or that he tried to identify the self not with matter but (ambiguously) with the world soul, understood in terms of an “immanent transcendence” that “reconciles the self to actuality” (22).¹²⁶

A deeper problem is that Quinney seems to overlook the romantic model of etho-ecological sympathy that joins both Blake and Wordsworth, and to construe affect in terms of empiricist materialism, in the sense of bare matter or “nature dead” (Whitehead). I take this as symptomatic of the models of affect that circulate in critical theory today, in which the basic incompatibility of critical and speculative materialism is insufficiently registered. Part of the question here is why Quinney emphasizes this universe of death, in Wordsworth, over the “universe of life” or “active universe” — radical empiricist intuition of affect as natural sweetness (*zoe*) or “self-enjoyment” (Whitehead) — with which he is more explicitly concerned. Why, also, does Quinney find in Blake a kind of psychological and imaginative transcendence of mere sense-experience? Why is this transcendence so vague? Why does it seem to leave out Blake’s philosophical, rather than psychological, emphasis on sympathy¹²⁷ as etho-ecological affection debarred by modern optics?

¹²⁶ Here, Quinney’s terms seem too nebulous. She seems to mean (by “immanent transcendence” that “reconciles the self to actuality”) that there is a dimension of the ordinary that exceeds materialism, which therefore offers an interrelational grounding for the self. But, in the same gesture, she seems to overlook the Wordsworthian resonances of this proposition. The notion of a *reconciliation* of self to actuality is more appropriate to Wordsworth’s sober Wordsworthian turn to ordinariness or “recessive ethos” (Francois) than to the Blake’s less compromising insistence on attention. Why, then, does Quinney limit her understanding of the early books of *The Prelude* to the unfolding of a materialist view of the self, haunted by the possibility that faith in nature is misplaced?

¹²⁷ In Blake’s parlance, “forgiveness,” because forgiveness more actively conveys the fact that to open into sympathy the closed ego must lower its hard defenses, the chief of which is its reflex to judge others. To relax this mechanism of judgment (and to relax optics into haptics) is to experience forgiveness. Blake is quick to point out that this forgiveness is not *for* others - which would still be a dualistic attitude. The chief error, and the hardest to admit, after all, is one’s reflex to isolate oneself by judging others.

9 Extra-Being: Blake's Disruption of the Line

The Negation is the Spectre, the Reasoning Power in Man:
This is a false Body, an Incrustation over my Immortal
Spirit, a Selfhood which must be put off and annihilated alway.
To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by self-examination,
To bathe in the waters of Life, to wash off the Not Human,
I come in Self-annihilation and the grandeur of Inspiration;
To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour,
To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration,
To cast off Bacon, Locke, and Newton from Albion's covering,
To take off his filthy garments and clothe him with Imagination;
To cast aside from Poetry all that is not Inspiration...

Blake, *Milton*

For a better understanding of this question of how both Blake and Wordsworth might have been interested, primarily, in a shift from empiricism to radical empiricism, and from sensation to affect, one may turn again to Lussier, who explores the ecosophical nature of Blake's thematic and formal concerns. Focusing on *Milton*, Lussier argues that Blake's poetry is insistently concerned with exposing and subverting the "hard cold constrictive Spectre" (J.3.25) or egocentric

enlightened rationality. The ecological nature of this insistence is brought out, by Lussier, in the context of alternative and nonwestern epistemologies, such as those of integral philosophy and wisdom traditions.

In ways that accord with Whitehead's analysis of western intellectual history, Lussier suggests that romantic poetry (with oblique ties to both German naturphilosophie and to eastern models of nonconceptual awareness), attempted to counteract the spectral optics reinforced by western enlightenment discourses. The problem with this optics was, as Peter Otto has argued, that it grasps the world via images, or via what Blake calls "circumscription."¹²⁸ In other words, the spectral self (the masculine "I," or rationality, divorced from its feminine "emanation," emotion)¹²⁹ prevents awareness of the porous, ecological nature of subjectivity. Lussier's essential argument is that Blake's art exposes the spectrality of the selfhood, or shatters an "image-making" that ordinary acts of reading and writing reinforce. He offers a brief summary of how, in Blake's mythology of the moderns, optic perception becomes dominant over haptic prehension. In doing so, Lussier foregrounds one of the trickiest yet most important structural ironies of Blake's work:

¹²⁸ In *The Social Vision of William Blake*, Michael Ferber comments, "One of the grisly sports the Daughters of Albion enjoy is 'circumscribing' the senses of London's inhabitants, who 'Feel their Brain cut round beneath the temples shrieking / Bonifying into a Scull' (58.7-8); 'London feels his brain cut round: Edinburghs heart is circumscribed!'" (66.64)... (Ferber 209).

¹²⁹ Blake dramatizes this contracted and encrusted optic mode, and its demand that feeling be replaced with reason, belief with experiment, in Book 3 of *Jerusalem*, depicting it as puritanical yet antagonistic to poetic or religious feeling:

But the Spectre like a hoar frost & a Mildew rose over Albion
Saying, I am God, O Sons of Men! I am your Rational Power!
Am I not Bacon & Newton & Locke who teach Humility to Man!
Who teach Doubt & Experiment & my two Wings Voltaire: Rousseau.
Where is that Friend of Sinners! that Rebel against my Laws!
Who teaches Belief to the Nations, & an unknown Eternal Life
Come hither into the Desart & turn these stones to bread.
Vain foolish Man! wilt thou believe without Experiment?
And build a World of Phantasy upon my Great Abyss!
A world of Shapes in craving lust & devouring appetite
So spake the hard cold constrictive Spectre... (J.3.15-25)

the fact that the optic and haptic points of view are complementary opposites. From an optic (Lockean) perspective, relationship looks like death or self-annihilation, while from a haptic (Spinozist) perspective, selfhood looks like death or barren isolation:

The spectre emerges through mirror stage dynamics; the "Reasoning Power in Man" reifies separate existence through "Rational Demonstration," and the necessary "Self-Annihilation" to overturn this state begins in "Self-Examination" designed "to wash off the Non Human." What is equally somewhat astonishing here — beyond the discrete definitions offered for the spectre, selfhood, self-annihilation, and self-examination — is the textual connection established between "self-annihilation" (which seems like death) and "selfhood" (which seems like life), an expression of Blake's ironic view of existence.

(Lussier, "Self-annihilation/inner revolution")

Lussier contributes an analysis of Blake's mirror writing to the ecocritical reading of his formal techniques. Importantly, he qualifies the Lacanian trajectory of this analysis with a model of integral ecology. Though he analyzes the structure of the self along Lacanian lines, he implies an integral model of subjectivity. I would only question whether his "integral view" tends to affirm the commonalities between aesthetic ontology and complex systems thinking, in ways that help build bridges but that also risk minimizing the different epistemic assumptions at work in metaphysical and (supposedly) nonmetaphysical materialisms.

On one hand, Lussier seems to affirm "network" models of mind, and on the other to affirm nondualism. While the network model certainly helps counteract the habit of grasping at autonomous mind and at a "separate self," it falls short, it seems to me, in that it still implies a serial, informational metaphysics. That is, the idea of a network strikes me as a technological metaphor, which does not adequately convey the notion of etho-ecological sympathy, or of Whiteheadian vectors of emotion.^{xxxvii} That said, Lussier's emphasis clearly falls on the modern doctrines that have "alienated individuals from the natural world." Ecocriticism, as he presents

it, is precisely concerned with analyzing, questioning, and (hopefully) undoing the “false divide” of (to put it in my words) centered optics.¹³⁰

His ecocritical approach is read to romantic poetry as a medicine that heals the fractured psychology of isolated, independent existence:

Within the analytic discourses of contemporary ecocriticism, the emergence of the sovereign self, a construct associated with 'first-stage' enlightenment thinking (i.e. the Cartesian cogito or Newtonian objectivity) has been seen as the pivotal philosophical development underwriting dualistic thinking that alienated individuals from the natural world in all possible relations... As much criticism in the ecological mode has argued, the reaction of Romantic writers to first-stage enlightenment thought sought to heal both the fissure of subject-object relations at its foundation and the fragmentation as its by-product. The salve offered to affect a 'cure' for the affliction just described within particular currents of Romantic thought and expression was self-annihilation and required a willed confrontation with the illusory nature of an independent, solitary, sovereign subject observing a separate material object, since "the self-positing ego cannot limit itself by positing non-ego opposed to itself," which contradicts "ordinary experience" (Beiser 137). (*Romantic Dharma*, 144)

Yet one is tempted to ask how a “willed confrontation” with the illusory nature of selfhood might lead to etho-ecological attention. Ostensibly, Lussier is referring, with this phrase, to Blake’s insistence on active, sensitive, decentered (*unwilled*) attention. Yet Lussier’s main point is sound: ecocriticism must meet the challenge of understanding romantic poetry’s drive toward self-annihilation as a drive toward “sacred ecology, or felt interrelation in excess of the isolating

¹³⁰ Lussier refers to Bateson’s notion of the "circuit structure" of “the fundamental ecological relationship of mind and matter,” and cites Fritjof Capra’s account of western dualism: “The origin of our [current ecological] dilemma lies in our tendency to create the abstractions of separate objects, including a separate self” (Lussier, *Romantic Dharma: The Emergence of Buddhism into Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 119). Pointing to Bateson and Capra as forerunners of Maturana and Varela’s model of autopoiesis, he cites Capra’s notion of the mind’s emergence from a “network,” and his assertion that “the phenomenon of life has to be understood as a property of the system as a whole” (Capra 10, cited in *Romantic Dharma*, 119). Given the ongoing dialogue mind between physicists and Buddhist philosophers, Lussier points to the studies of Blake, Buddhism, and Ecocriticism as “shared practices [that] provide a means for refusing a false divide between arenas of thought and experience in preference for an integral view capable of creating a unified framework for all self-generated actions.”

center.¹³¹ His reading is most vivid when it links Blake's "annihilative process" (possibly adapted from "Christian mystical traditions") to Blake's textual practices:

...the method that activates the emergence of "negative consciousness," self-annihilation, is best viewed in William Blake's *Milton* because the process of self-annihilation is literally encoded into its "composite" textual state (Mitchell 3-40) at the thematic and textual layers of signification itself. (43)

Reading *Milton*, Lussier points out that the "textual trajectory maps the 'movement of mind from ignorance to wisdom, from crass materialism to the universe as sacred body'" (Brown 132, cited in *Romantic Dharma*). This textual trajectory, Lussier implies, is complemented by a "visual field" that exposes the dark psychological consequences of empiricist psychology: "The visual field in Blake's last prophecies energetically attempts to bring the tragic fate of subject formation into readerly consciousness" (136). Thus, in ways that resonate with readings by Quinney, Francois, and Yousef, Lussier emphasizes that Blake's prophetic texts bring the etho-ecological back into view by exposing the absurdity of the naturalistic.

Lussier turns to Lacan to cast light on the question of why Blake presents "the natural man" as in enmity with inspiration or vision: "quite clearly for Blake, the state of selfhood emerges from what can only be termed, following Lacan, a 'mirror-stage' encounter with the 'vegetable glass of nature' or what Lacan terms 'the intra-organic mirror' (Lacan *Ecrits* 2, 5-6). This mirror-stage, then, is what Whitehead calls "perception in the mode of presentational immediacy" – the image-

¹³¹ I have quoted this passage from Lussier earlier, but it takes on renewed relevance here:

Through the dynamic operations of word and design, Blake generates an enriched semiotic textual environment specifically designed to unveil selfhood and stage self-annihilation... Blake's illuminated prophecies achieve their complexities by drawing upon "disparate discourses to create a bricolage" (Mee 5), refracting linguistic and semiotic rays into a spectrum of aesthetic ex/pression (that is, both as representation and as counter-repression), and such artistic labor achieves a fusion that underwrites "a new kind of body" and anticipates "a new kind of being" (Makdisi 262). (45)

making or representational mode that Kant ascribed to cognition. Lussier proposes that the term “specter” refers to “both the eye and the gaze” – both in the sense of a narrow aperture or contracted organ, and in the sense of the modern presupposition of discrete sensation. Blake’s challenge to this spectrality, Lussier observes, has traditionally been recognized as the “heart” of Blake’s “visionary process” or of his “epic effort to textually embody his transformational ethos” in both “visual and verbal dimensions”:

Phrased directly, 'selfhood' emerges through mirror stage dynamics and is the "spectre" or imago of a solitary and self-sufficient "self"; self-consciousness initially reifies this external imago yet subsequently recognizes its fantasy structure, thereby igniting self-examination as a skillful means to achieve "anti-self-consciousness," in Geoffrey Hartman's apt phrase, which reaches a climax in self-annihilation and which leads to Blake's last judgment (Hartman 47-56). Almost every critic drawn to Blake's epic effort to textually embody his transformational ethos attempts to articulate some type of understanding of the convoluted processes that link the state of selfhood (the diagnosed malady of obsessive self-consciousness) and the act of self-annihilation (the salvific antidote to this narcissistic malady). From early respondents like William and Dante Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne and William Butler Yeats to the vibrant generation of critics currently elaborating the deeply enriched environment of contemporary Blake studies, these concepts stand at the heart of visionary process, providing the acute diagnosis of the human condition and its active antidote, respectively. (RD 124)

Like Quinney, Lussier emphasizes the therapeutics of Blake’s radical psychology, or his “acute diagnosis of the human condition and its active antidote” (124), but in ways that attend to Blakean reintegration as an insightful act of forgiveness rather than transcendence. Following Otto’s *Visionary Deconstruction*, he highlights the seventh night of *The Four Zoas*, an unfinished manuscript that forms the “textual unconscious” (138) of Blake’s later epics. A crucial passage in the seventh night describes the transformation in the antagonistic relationship between Los (fallen imagination) and his Spectre (disembodied rationality). Instead of attempting to master and drive his Spectre, Los realizes that it is only in forgiveness of his rational aspect that he can achieve integration:

. . . Los embrac'd the Spectre first as a brother

Then as another Self; astonishd humanizing & in tears,
In Self abasement Giving up his Domineering lust
. . .by Self-annihilation back returning
To life Eternal. (E 367-8; FZ 85.30-5)

Lussier suggests that Los recognizes that the Spectre, too, is not an independent and permanent existence — a kind of nonentity — but is indivisible from creative becoming or self-ing:

At this stage of the work, Albion continues to fragment and is poised on the abyss of "death and torment" (E 376; FZ 95.4), in danger of collapsing into a subject state Blake terms "non-entity" which always has dire psychological and historical consequences. However, as Peter Otto notes, even at this dark textual moment, "the embrace of the Spectre allows Los to bridge the gap between self and subject, objective world and subjective individual" (244), thereby enacting a "self-annihilation" by which imagination returns to primal unity where any essential understanding of self disappears: "thou art but a form & organ of life & of thyself/ Art nothing being Created Continually" (E 368; FZ 86.1-3). (RD 125)

Blake's use of mirror writing, then, is one of Blake's many verbal and visual techniques of opening the spectral "line" (abstraction, non-entity) to inspiration, or etho-ecological vision. Lussier points to the pervasive interplay of text and image, specific use of mirror writing in *Milton* and in *Jerusalem*, as disruptions the tendency (in writing and reading) to re-center the subject. Mirror writing tricks one into self-consciousness of the complicity or co-dependence between the reflective subject and the act of reading. Lussier thus offers context for the vital piece of mirrored writing on plate forty-one of *Jerusalem*:

...Blake's most precise statement on the malady (selfhood) and its cure (self-annihilation through self-examination) occurs on plate forty-one of *Jerusalem* in a half-plate design, where readers encounter Albion sound asleep and in serious need of awakening (illustration three). The head of Albion, Blake's everyman (yet particular country) figure, has collapsed in slumber on a scrolled text draped across his knees. On the left side of the visual field, an impish figure (most often identified directly with Blake as the voice of the work's four "addresses" to particular audiences) rests on left margin on the curled leaves of the scroll with quill in hand, reclining after a meta-textual act of inspired mirrored writing:

Each Man is in his Spectre's power
Untill the arrival of that hour.
When his Humanity awake [s]

And cast his Spectre into the Lake. (El 38; 41)
(Lussier 52)

As Lussier explains, Blake is, at were, breaking the reflective fifth wall between himself and the reader, inviting the reader, too, to reach through the mirror: “When we adopt the spectre of the imago, we indeed become what we behold, assuming an image of totality and self-sufficiency, but Blake clearly strives to cultivate, in readers attuned to the visual field in the later illuminated works, the ability to shatter this mirror at will” (53). He notes, in ways that resonate with Goldsmith’s deconstructive reading in *Unbuilding Jerusalem*, that Blake foregrounds rather than conceals his own local acts of representation, the better to shatter the myth of a pure rather than promiscuous mode of experience: “Blake reinforces this view of the shaping power of mirrored dynamics by unveiling, in the mirrored writing itself, his own process of textual production (inverse inscription on copper plates) at the foundation of the composite text.” In this respect, the culminating event of Blake’s *Jerusalem*, as Goldsmith argues, is neither religious nor utopian but pluralistic.

10 Blake’s Haptic Aesthetics: fibres of sympathy & the ethics of immanence

For a better understanding of how ecological thinking disrupts linearity,¹³² it may be helpful to return to the discussion of speculative feminism that I began in the analysis of Blake’s “Earth’s Answer.”¹³³ This transversal connection between Blake and speculative feminism, I would argue,

¹³² And of how postsecular etho-ecological thinking (*natura naturans*) disrupts secular materialism (*natura naturata*).

¹³³ Implicit in Lussier’s argument is the notion that writing itself involves a certain spectrality, an issued clarified by Claire Colebrook’s *Blake, Deleuzian Aesthetics, and the Digital*. Colebrook notes how

is apposite in that both urgently identify the roots of the global ecological crisis in modern epistemic violence, and both deploy heretical irony toward residual forms of dualism.

In “Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene,” Donna Haraway draws on Stengers to remind us that truly ecological thinking must depart from an anthropocentric humanistic understanding of Gaia, “[f]ocusing on intrusion rather than composition.” This “intrusion into our affairs is a radically materialist event that collects up multitudes,” Haraway argues, and would be better termed the Chthulucene than the Anthropocene. She agrees with Latour that modernity has, to its own peril, denied representation to the “middle kingdom” (Latour) of what she calls “multitudes,” but draws on Stengers’s more pagan and animist model of Gaia (after centuries of witch burnings)¹³⁴ as not a woman or a person but a kind of hydra or medusa, a manifold in which we are involved:

Shaping her thinking about the times called Anthropocene and “multi-faced Gaia” (Stengers’s term) in companionable friction with Latour, Isabelle Stengers does not ask that we recompose ourselves to become able, perhaps, to “face Gaia.” But like Latour and even more like Le Guin, one of her most generative SF writers, Stengers is adamant about changing the story. Focusing on intrusion rather than composition, Stengers calls Gaia a fearful and devastating power that intrudes on our categories of thought, that intrudes on thinking itself. Earth/Gaia is maker and destroyer, not resource to be exploited or ward to be protected or nursing mother promising nourishment. Gaia is not a person but complex systemic phenomena that compose a living planet. Gaia’s intrusion into our affairs is a radically materialist event that collects up multitudes. This intrusion threatens not life on Earth itself—microbes will adapt, to put it mildly—but threatens the livability of Earth for vast kinds, species, assemblages, and individuals in an “event” already under way called the Sixth Great Extinction.

....Gaia is an intrusive event that undoes thinking as usual. “She is what specifically questions the tales and refrains of modern history. There is only one real mystery at stake, here: it is the answer we, meaning those who belong to this history, may be able to create as we face the consequences of what we have provoked.”

Blake’s hybrid verbal and visual art bypasses or short-circuits the optic control of the eye over the hand, in favor of a haptic aesthetics. Likewise, Tristanne Connolly’s *William Blake and the Body* explores the ecological manner in which Blake disrupts the line.

¹³⁴ I write this very much as someone who “hath put his heart to school” and been a “groveler” that “sip[s] his stagnant pool.” (Wordsworth, “*A poet!* – he hath put his hear to school”)

Haraway advocates not a return to the order of nature as traditionally conceived, but a shift from modern imperializing “knowledge practices” toward transformative new models inspired by post-classical biology:

What happens when human exceptionalism and bounded individualism, those old saws of Western philosophy and political economics, become unthinkable in the best sciences, whether natural or social? Seriously unthinkable: not available to think with. Biological sciences have been especially potent in fermenting notions about all the mortal inhabitants of the Earth since the imperializing eighteenth century. *Homo sapiens*—the Human as species, the Anthropos as the human species, Modern Man—was a chief product of these knowledge practices. What happens when the best biologies of the twenty-first century cannot do their job with bounded individuals plus contexts, when organisms plus environments, or genes plus whatever they need, no longer sustain the overflowing richness of biological knowledges, if they ever did? What happens when organisms plus environments can hardly be remembered for the same reasons that even Western-indebted people can no longer figure themselves as individuals and societies of individuals in human-only histories? Surely such a transformative time on Earth must not be named the Anthropocene!

I would add that the “multi-faced Gaïa” that feminist thinkers (Haraway, Stengers, Braidotti, Bennett) propose is *not* equivalent to the monstrous organic vitality of Blake’s Polypus.¹³⁵ If, as Haraway insists, the point is “changing the story,” then the pertinent question is how a model of monstrous vitality departs from the model of the Polypus that Blake found implicit in scientific materialism? How does Haraway’s notion of Gaia as a “radically materialist event” change this story? I would suggest that Stengers’ “multi-faced Gaïa” and Haraway’s medusa or hydra are haptic metaphors.¹³⁶ Here, again, I understand the haptic in terms of “the feeling of one feeling by another feeling” (Whitehead) or in terms of affect rather than sensation.¹³⁷ With Braidotti, I would suggest that the monstrous aspect of “multi-faced Gaïa” and of “becoming-insect” is

¹³⁵ A figure Gigante points to as evidence that romantic aesthetics was inspired by romantic science.

¹³⁶ Stengers resituates the Wiccan anthem, “She changes everything she touches, and everything she touches changes,” in ways that are haptic.

¹³⁷ In this same vein, Braidotti’s intervention in Agamben’s biopolitical model of zoe, which she recasts not simply as vitality but as interrelation, holds the potential to foster a shift toward an etho-ecology of affect rather than an economic psychology of sensation.

actually a projection of modern rationality (which perceives interrelationship as a threat to centered experience). I will discuss this further in comparing two poems about the buzzing of a fly in Blake and Dickinson, but for the moment, my point, with Braidotti, is that “zoe” may be radically life-affirming. If “she” intrudes, she does so less as the Mighty Polypus than as touch, tenderness, or mutual affect, in haptic excess of the “image of thought” (Deleuze).

In the context of Blake’s intrusive rather than compositional aesthetics, one might turn to Tristanne Connolly’s *William Blake and the Body*. Connolly’s discussion of Blake’s lines, and the bodily lineaments of his figures, connects to Braidotti’s critique of humanist universalism,¹³⁸ clarifying how Blake reverses Smith’s reduction of sympathy to calculative, emotionally sanitized, self-interest. Incisively, Connolly shows how in Blake an individual’s “fibers” tend toward infinite sympathy: it is through exceeding one’s bounds that one reaches toward the universal/infinite. Attitudes like pity or mercy are frozen universals yoked to a moral center, in contrast to an infinite or affective sympathy toward which one’s very lines or fibers tend.

Offering a nuanced account of the valence of the term “sympathy” in the romantic period, and its “history” of feeling, Connolly clarifies how Blake enacts a response to the empiricist foreclosure (by Smith and Burke) of etho-ecological sympathy:

The physical body, though it binds us in muscles and fibres, also plays an important part in making sympathy possible. Blake’s emphasis on muscle need not exclusively imply being muscle-bound; it can also suggest that the viewer passes through the skin of the figure...

Adam Smith recognizes that ‘we have no immediate experience of what other men feel’, but when we try to understand the sufferings of a ‘brother’, ‘by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence

¹³⁸ Adam Smith, for instance, advanced a theory of moral sentiments that assumed the fraternal universality of one’s moral feelings are universal (to the extent that one is a “brother”) but framed this universality within a model of the bounded, self-interested subject. Smith recast the long eighteenth century notion of “sympathy” in ways that purged it of etho-ecological implications and explained it in terms of “private psychology” (Whitehead).

from some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, although weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike him' (9). Though Smith envisions an imaginative exchange between sufferer and sympathizer, he realizes that experience of another's pain is actually self-enclosed: 'we can form no idea of the manner in which [others] are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation' (9). There is always that remove; there is no way for anyone to get out of his or her skin, and enter completely into another's body and bodily experience. For Burke, sympathy is a 'sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected; and if that other person is in pain, then sympathy will 'partake' of 'self-preservation' (41). Burke writes, 'When danger and pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful' (36-7)... (Connolly, 67-8)

What Connolly points out here, too, is that "delight," as redefined by Burke, and in conservative empiricism, carries nearly the opposite valence that it does in Blake. For Burke, delight results from a sense of reflective distance and mastery. By contrast, for Blake delight involves precisely the transgression of reflective distance and mastery: radical sympathy. "Blake," she observes, "uses the word 'sympathy' only three times," and the third usage is particularly interesting, because it underscores the ways in which he saw lines not simply as compositional but as transgressive and transversal, moving across domains of apparently private or exclusive interests.

Connolly argues that Blake's fibre imagery, like his treatment of bodily lineaments, tends *toward* universality precisely by moving past the appropriation of universal attributes by the humanist center. In other words, universality is not to be possessed in the abstract. One cannot practice mercy or pity as an idea, a policy, or a "value" endorsed or possessed by the deliberate, reflective subject. For Blake, sympathies are active, haptic, pluralistic processes into which one must enter: "He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars / General Good is the plea of the scoundrel hypocrite & flatterer: / For Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars / And not in generalizing Demonstrations of Rational Power. / The Infinite alone resides in Definite & Determinate Identity" (J.360-62). If there is a "General" or "Universal" form, then it is active interrelation, or sympathy in its most radical sense (which he associates with

both the imagination and with “Christ”). As Connolly suggests, in Blake lines are uniquely themselves because they are becomings (or becoming-other), in relationship and not in abstraction. To be oneself is to tend toward the universal, while to attempt to embody the universal (including the abstract notion of mercy) is to proscribe such sympathies or interrelational tendencies. One can extrapolate here that Blake’s haptic, etho-ecological notion of “forgiveness” radically differs from the conventional virtue of “mercy,” which reinforces “Blasphemous Selfhoods.”¹³⁹ Lines, for Blake, are inherently lines of sympathy tending, intensively, toward the thoroughly promiscuous “Universal Form” of the “Divine Humanity”:

Blake’s final use of the word is in *Jerusalem* where Blake again sees ‘sympathy’ as positive and universal. He writes of ‘the Divine- / Humanity, who is the Only General and Universal Form / To which all Lineaments tend & seek with love & sympathy’ (*J* 43[38]:19-21). The word ‘lineaments’, involving the word ‘line’ as it does and denoting the forms... which tend toward the Universal Form, is part of Blake’s complex of fibre imagery. Lines on the plate, and fibres in the body, create the lineaments. The lineaments ‘tend & seek’ toward the Divine Humanity like tendrils, feelers... for Blake, individuality is necessary for sympathy, not subsumed by it. The Divine Humanity is the only true general form, and that is because it protects the minute particulars... The Divine Humanity actually does contain all forms, and so is able to become other forms; whereas, as Los cries in *Jerusalem*, ‘No Individual ought to appropriate to Himself / Or to his Emanation, any of the universal Characteristics / Of David or of Eve, of the Woman. or of the Lord’ (90:28-30). Ironically, this attempt to become more universal merely makes one more cut off, because it leads to vegetation and generation: ‘Those who dare appropriate to themselves Universal Attributes / Are the Blasphemous Selfhoods & must be broken asunder / A Vegetated Christ & a Virgin Eve’ (90:32-4). True sympathy relies on being truly oneself, while ‘pity’, or trying to put oneself in another’s place, which is impossible, ‘divides the soul’ (*BU* 12:53). (Connolly, 69-70)

Connolly, in effect, emphasizes the extent to which Blake’s lines are, as Deleuze wrote of the painter Francis Bacon’s lines, “expressive.” What is expressed is not the personal or private but an etho-ecological or interrelational “logic of sensation.” Arguably, Connolly making this connection

¹³⁹ “Pity would be no more,
If we did not make somebody Poor;
And Mercy no more could be,
If all were as happy as we.”
(The Human Abstract)

with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of affect as extra-being is a necessary next step if one is to make sense of the idea that "Art expresses personal identity" and that the line is "the direct expression of imagination," which she cites from Morris Eaves:

Such an interpretation of Blake's view of pity holds with his theory of art, as Morris Eaves explains it. Eaves sees that for Blake 'Art expresses personal identity' (*Theory* 34), and more specifically, 'Artistic line is the expression of personal identity'; individuals are able to recognize each other by their lines. Line is also 'the direct expression of imagination' (175); in this way artistic expression, the true self, and the imagination (the faculty Smith credits with enabling sympathy) are equivalent. Fibres are the organs of sympathy, and the fibrelike line defines and communicates the self.... (70)

Here, Connolly seems to make a logical error in alluding to Smith's view that the imagination enables sympathy, because Smith would likely adamantly reject the notion that "fibres are the organs of sympathy."¹⁴⁰ Likewise, her assertion that "the fibrelike line defines and communicates the self" requires reconsideration, via Deleuzian aesthetics, which would emphasize that the line is a "flight" or a becoming-other. Connolly, with Eaves, seems to reify imagination ("Line is also 'the direct expression of imagination'") as if were a private property or mark of personal uniqueness. Yet, for Blake, as for Deleuze, imagination is that which moves in the undoing or unbinding of the isolated I.¹⁴¹ Given Blake's insistent subversion of the selfhood, it might be better to replace the sensationalist notion of "personal identity" with the radical empiricist notion of "subjectless subjectivity" (Massumi). That said, even the haptic models of Deleuzian thinkers have tended to confuse affect with sheer heterogeneity, or radical alterity.

¹⁴⁰ Smith's tendency seems, rather, to be to tell an increasingly proscriptive story about sympathy, purifying it as much as possible of what traditional British emotionalists (Shaftesbury, Hume, Smith, Burke) found so objectionable about enthusiasm: its "corporeal" and "contagious" dimension. By conceiving sympathy as an imaginative act, Smith persuades his contemporaries that sympathy (affective transmission, shared feeling) has no real existence. Sympathy is made up, imagined. The bounded, self-interested, rational individual alone is real.

¹⁴¹ Imagination is extra-being.

To explore this complicated issue, I will touch momentarily on Claire Colebrook's groundbreaking and challenging *Blake, Deleuzian Aesthetics, and the Digital*. Briefly, Colebrook highlights Blake's "haptic aesthetics," in which affect or sympathy is freed from the confines of the bounded subject, so that, as Deleuze puts it, what surfaces is "the relationship not of form and matter, but of materials and forces – making these forces visible through their effects on the flesh" (*Francis Bacon* 10). She describes the analog and manual dimension of the Blakean line as a movement of fluid relations, but complicates this observation by asking if Blake's art is also not, at the same time, insistently digital, exposing the subject to a heterogeneous difference that exceeds its capacity for "composition" or for a coherent human perspective.

Colebrook repeats a skeptical, anti-essentialist tendency characteristic of Deleuze's earlier writings. In his later, constructivist work, however, Deleuze suggests how art affirms "belief in the world" by fostering sensitivity to subjectless affect – or to the virtual, as the "pure immanence" of "a life." In this respect, Blake's view that the universal is only to be found in lived and singular relation, rather than in abstraction, anticipates and resonates with Deleuze's Bergsonian and Spinozist ethics of immanence:

Absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, *to* something; it does not depend on an object or belong to a subject... When the subject or the object falling outside the plane of immanence is taken as a universal subject or as any object to which immanence is attributed... immanence is distorted, for it then finds itself enclosed in the transcendent. (*Pure Immanence* 26-7).

I would also suggest that Colebrook overcomplicates these questions when she associates the digital with the haptic. It strikes me that the digital is ocular. In ways that Kevis Goodman discusses in *Georgic Modernity*, the digital involves a "microscopic" empiricist eye, which finds itself threatened by the radical insistence of material particularity. As Goodman argues, this active heterogeneity disrupts and interrupts the centered humanist perspective (exposing its naive sense of occupying a central place in the material universe as an illusion of human senses adjusted to the

world in self-preserving or self-buffering ways). Yet Goodman also writes that this “microscopic eye” is a “fantasy-nightmare,” implying that the “nightmare” is the corollary of the “fantasy.” The “fantasy” of the empiricist eye is an “enhanced” control over matter via enhanced techniques of perception, but its corresponding “nightmare” is the threatened collapse of distanced, reflective mastery (optics) into intimacy (haptics).

Much as my own reading has been enhanced by the analysis of haptic aesthetics presented by Colebrook and Goodman, I would argue that both tend to conflate the haptic and the digital. Goodman for instance writes that techniques of enhanced perception threatened optic mastery by making the optic verge too closely on the haptic. Colebrook likewise emphasizes the ways in which heterogeneity disrupts coherent subjectivity, so that no sense can be made of sensation. It might help to remember, with Emily Dickinson, that the problem is actually the imposition of common sense upon sensation, a “starkest madness” that sanitizes sensitive attention of its etho-ecological dimension, or of “divinest sense.” Granted, Goodman’s and Colebrook’s implicit points may be that the haptic is a threat *from the point of view* of centered optics. If so, this point should be made more explicit, because it is all too easy to repeat the cliché that all subjective sense of interrelation, naturalness, or meaning is aesthetic fantasy.

As I have been suggesting, the problem is less that radical nonhuman alterity truly exists and truly threatens the subject (despite what poststructuralist eco-theory suggests) than that the haptic is misconstrued, by centered optics, as barren or digital matter.¹⁴² The empiricist subject perceives the intimacy of interrelation as threatening precisely because he cleaves to a metaphysics of isolated location. The modern secular subject, whose perceptions are organized around the exclusion of etho-ecological metaphysics, presumes that material particulars are “digital.”

¹⁴² *Natura naturans* is misperceived as *natura naturata*. Centered optics sees zoe as brute matter rather than natural sweetness.

Working from this unquestioned optics, poststructuralist eco-criticism tends to conflate the haptic and the digital, taking the latter for a radical nonhuman alterity or generativity from which subjectivity seeks to shelter itself via ideological fantasies. In this way, affect, too, tends to be conflated with the digital (stimulation) and with a brute materiality that, for Whitehead, is itself imputed and imagined: in the lived event, fact and value co-originate. One “feels” nature as “as exhibiting entwined prehensive unities, each suffused with modal presences of others” (SMW 84). In brief, modern optics sanitizes matter of affect, stranding the subject in the gothic universe of life-in-death. It does so, Blake and his fellow romantics seems to suggest, in order to harden itself against an “enemy” that turns out to be more-than-human tenderness, or interrelational life unconfined by human exceptionalism.

Here, Whitehead’s writings suggest that the philosophical grounds for endorsing radical alterity (along the lines of sheer heterogeneity) are not as strong as they may seem, and that the critical temptation to “explain away” the romantic notions of “interfusion” or sympathy as aesthetic fantasy is, in fact, less postmodern and new than symptomatically modern: it simply continues to institute the modern bar on metaphysics. The question hinges on whether one accepts “critical” materialism as genuinely more rigorous than “speculative” materialism. Whitehead shows that critical materialism is actually the less philosophically rigorous, and less “world-loyal,” view. In this context, it might be a betrayal of Blake’s work to retroject radical alterity into his writing, which agrees with Wordsworth’s emphatically on the view that everything that lives is holy or is full of blessings.

11 The Torments of Material Inscription in Night the Sixth of the *The Four Zoas*

What happens when “direct observation” turns out to be infected with an atomistic and dualistic metaphysics? For Whitehead, the consequence is modern skepticism, even as for Blake, the consequence is a fall into despair or nonentity. Blake implies that such a complete fall is not really possible, given that, no matter how deep one’s skepticism, it is ultimately difficult if not impossible to doubt the “clay” of one’s lived experience, that bodily faith implied in Blake’s phrase: “he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover.” Urizen (reason in division from passion, sensation, and creativity) in effect has fallen only in its imagination, *into* isolated consciousness, or *from* etho-ecological attention in excess of “private psychology.”

Various critics, commenting on Blake’s multi-modal visual and verbal art, have ventured the view that he self-consciously identified with Urizen, the forger of “metal” books.¹⁴³ Yet, as suggested earlier,¹⁴⁴ nowhere is the picture of material embodiment and textual inscription more tortured than in *The Four Zoas*. In Night the Sixth of the *The Four Zoas*, Blake explicitly links discursive re-inscription to the persistence, or ghastly resurrection (life-in-death), of the optics of finitude.

Here, as in *The Book of Urizen*, the metal books are sites of inscriptive institutional violence, linked to weapons of war and to fragmentations of the psyche. In the passage, Tharmas (the Zoa of warmth or of the bodily passions) enjoins Urizen, the “King of Light” (Vala 51) and “cold demon” (Vala 56), to give him death, as he feels himself trapped in the ceaseless generativity of matter’s “monstrous forms”:

¹⁴³ After all, he labored mainly by engraving copper plates, printing in an “infernal method” that reversed the intaglio mode by using solvents to eat into the actual plate, allowing him to introduce spontaneous cross-connections and interrelations into text and image, “melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid” (*Marriage of Heaven*).

¹⁴⁴ In my discussion of Wordsworth and Blake’s ambivalence toward books.

...death my desire
That I in vain in various paths have sought but still I live
The Body of Man is given to me I seek in vain to destroy
For still it surges forth in fish & monsters of the deeps
And in these monstrous forms... (57-61)

Split from one another, Tharmas and Urizen respectively represent the dark passions of matter and cold or disembodied consciousness: "Withhold thy light from me for ever," Tharmas tells Urizen, "& I will withhold / From thee thy food. So shall we cease to be & all our sorrows / End, & the Eternal Man no more renew beneath our power" (Vala 64-6). :

...Before him Tharmas fled, & flying fought,
Crying. What & who art thou Cold Demon. art thou Urizen
Art thou like me risen again from death or art thou deathless
If thou art he my desperate purpose hear & give me death
For death to me is better far than life. death my desire
That I in vain in various paths have sought but still I live
The Body of Man is given to me I seek in vain to destroy
For still it surges forth in fish & monsters of the deeps
And in these monstrous forms I Live in an Eternal woe

And thou O Urizen art falln never to be deliverd
Withhold thy light from me for ever & I will withhold
From thee thy food so shall we cease to be & all our sorrows
End & the Eternal Man no more renew beneath our power
If thou refusest in eternal flight thy beams in vain
Shall pursue Tharmas & in vain shalt crave for food I will
Pour down my flight thro dark immensity Eternal falling
Thou shalt pursue me but in vain till starvd upon the void
Thou hangst a dried skin shrunk up weak wailing in the wind (54-71)

Urizen, of course, refuses Tharmas's proposal, and thus his "eternal beams" are forced to pursue the passions of matter that fly from him "thro dark immensity." Urizen, in effect, falls into bare matter, a masculine hero facing "monsters of the deep," pressing forward in vain, as the "howlings gnashings groanings shriekings shudderings sobbings burstings" of creatures of earth, or the world of the abyss, "Mingle together to create a world for Los" (81-3).

Bearing his globe of light, Urizen records “in bitter tears & groans in books of iron & brass / The enormous wonders of the abyss” where beings suffer the horrors of the modern, gothic sensationalist psychology: “Beyond the bounds of their own self their senses cannot penetrate” (93). Wandering in a medieval, infernal realm of “dishumanizd men” (113) – “Many in serpents & in worms stretchd out enormous length / Over the sullen mould & slimy tracks obstruct his way” (114-15) – he recognizes his own responsibility for producing an epistemic regime of miserable self-interest, or an accursed foreclosure of etho-ecological sympathy:

...no one answerd every one wrapd up
In his own sorrow howld regardless of his words, nor voice
Of sweet response could he obtain tho oft assayd with tears
He knew they were his Children ruind in his ruind world...” (124-127)

Not only are the “men” of the “abyss” unable to speak with him, or with each other, but the nonhuman actants of the world are also divorced from communication, and hostile:

A Rock a Cloud a Mountain
Were now not Vocal as in Climes of happy Eternity
Where the lamb replies to the infant voice & the lion to the man of years
Giving them sweet instructions Where the Cloud the River & the Field
Talk with the husbandman & shepherd. But these attackd him sore
Siezing upon his feet & rending the Sinews that in Caves
He hid to recure his obstructed powers with rest & oblivion (131-7)

Retreating to reflect, he realizes that he cannot undo this subjection of his own children: “*He could not take their fetters off for they grew from the soul / Nor could he quench the fires for they flame out from the heart / Nor could he calm the Elements because himself was Subject...*” (140-2). After traveling into the “Hills & Vales of torment & despair,” he seems to fall into despair, resigning himself to a belief in, or wish for, nonentity:

...then turning round he threw
Himself into the dismal void. falling he fell & fell
Whirling in unresistible revolutions down & down
In the horrid bottomless vacuity falling failing falling
Into the Eastern vacuity the empty world of Luvah

He is rescued by the “ever pitying one,” who presents his nihilistic fall from being bottomless or endless by creating “a bosom of clay,” or a ground into which he dies, but from which he is vegetatively reborn:

The ever pitying one who seeth all things saw his fall
And in the dark vacuity created a bosom of clay
When wearied dead he fell his limbs reposed in the bosom of slime
As the seed falls from the sowers hand so Urizen fell & death
Shut up his powers in oblivion. then as the seed shoots forth
In pain & sorrow. So the slimy bed his limbs renewed
At first an infant weakness. periods passed he gathered strength
But still in solitude he sat then rising threw his flight
Onward thro falling thro the waste of night & ending in death
And in another resurrection to sorrow & weary travel
But still his books he bore in his strong hands & his iron pen
For when he died they lay beside his grave & when he rose
He seized them with a gloomy smile for wrapped in his death clothes
He hid them when he slept in death when he revived the clothes
Were rotted by the winds the books remained still unconsumed
Still to be written & interleaved with brass & iron & gold
Time after time for such a journey none but iron pens
Can write And adamant leaves receive nor can the man who goes
The journey obstinate refuse to write time after time

In this extraordinary passage, it seems that, in ways that Tharmas’s complaints about regeneration foreshadowed, Urizen is compelled to take up his metal books time and again to record the materialist “wonders” of the abyss (an ironic phrase that may recall Blake’s famous monotype of Newton bent over his compasses).

Here it becomes apparent that Tharmas’s appeal to Urizen (that both consciousness and matter, in effect, starve each other out of existence) was perhaps not a very good solution to the problem. When Urizen refuses this appeal, Tharmas avenges himself by forcing Urizen to pursue him into the very forms of sorrow and limitation that Tharmas feels condemned to experience. It does not help matters much that Urizen brings his “globe of light” (enlightened reason) into the “abyss” of materialism. After all, the larger problem for Blake is that the four zoas (Urizen,

Tharmas, Luvah, and Urthona) have fallen into division, and require new integration. In effect, Blake is interested in bridging the philosophical divide between idealism and materialism, or mind and matter. In a Whiteheadian sense, the cause of Tharmas's suffering is a modern optics of "presentational immediacy," a mode of perception that has an important place in cognition, but that has the tendency of cutting itself off from metaphysics.

Tharmas, and the other Zoas, are caught, as it were, in the mode of presentational immediacy, for which matter and mind appear to be severed. Urizen's travels into the abyss, and the record he keeps of its "wonders," is thus analogous to the modern scientific attitude, which, with painful irony, restricts mind to the study of mere matter, in the mode of presentational immediacy, never taking note of the fact that what it conceives as independent matter is a kind of worship of its own capacity for representation, which in turn implies a resistance to asking the questions about interrelationship that might shake its sense of clear and distinct (or, centered, circumscriptive) perception: "But Urizen said Can I not leave this world of Cumbrous wheels" (Vala, FQ).

Urizen seeks to escape this "world of Cumbrous wheels," either by attaining a higher "void" through idealism or a lower "void" through materialism, hoping to travel "round the outside of this Dark confusion." Yet, neither strategy works. He is caught in a loop or vortex that he compares to the cycle of sleep and waking, or the ongoing revolutions/reanimations of life-in-death:

But Urizen said Can I not leave this world of Cumbrous wheels
Circle oer Circle nor on high attain a void
Where self sustaining I may view all things beneath my feet
Or sinking thro these Elemental wonders swift to fall
I thought perhaps to find an End a world beneath of voidness
Whence I might travel round the outside of this Dark confusion
When I bend downward bending my bead downward into the deep
Tis upward all which way soever I my course begin
But when A Vortex formd on high by labour & sorrow & care
And weariness begins on all my limbs then sleep revives

My wearied spirits waking then tis downward all which way
So ever I my spirits turn no end I find of all

One can read his descent into the abyss as an imaginal “fall” into a circumscriptive optics that isolates him in the (now ruinous-seeming or barren) world:

O what a world is here unlike those climes of bliss
Where my sons gatherd round my knees O thou poor ruind world
Thou horrible ruin once like me thou wast all glorious
And now like me partaking desolate thy masters lot
Art thou O ruin the once glorious heaven are these thy rocks
Where joy sang in the trees & pleasure sported on the rivers
And laughter sat beneath the Oaks & innocence sported round
Upon the green plains & sweet friendship met in palaces
And books & instruments of song & pictures of delight
Where are they whelmd beneath these ruins in horrible destruction
And if Eternal falling I repose on the dark bosom
Of winds & waters or thence fall into a Void where air
Is not down falling thro immensity ever & ever
I lose my powers weakend every revolution till a death
Shuts up my powers then a seed in the vast womb of darkness
I dwell in dim oblivion. brooding over me the Enormous worlds
Reorganize me shooting forth in bones & flesh & blood
I am regenerated to fall or rise at will or to remain
A labourer of ages a dire discontent a living woe
Wandering in vain. Here will I fix my foot & here rebuild
Here Mountains of Brass promise much riches in their dreadful bosoms

Imagining himself as a solitary individual, brooded over by “Enormous worlds” that impel his regeneration, he is a prototype of the modern observer who substitutes control over matter for the bliss of interrelationship, or who trades unfabricated attention for the sovereign power (as a “king”) to bind “all futurity” in “his vast chain”:

So he began to dig form[ing] of gold silver & iron
And brass vast instruments to measure out the immense & fix
The whole into another world better suited to obey
His will where none should dare oppose his will himself being King
Of All & all futurity be bound in his vast chain

Blake implies that religion, in its morose and moralistic sense, is *produced* by Urizen in his optics of sorrow and “selfish lamentation.” In that sense, secular science and institutional religion go

hand in hand: both center on an authoritarian figure intolerant of, and quick to punish, the “sins” by which others fail to live by his codes or laws. Apparently, the “dire Web” of religion follows the scientific system-maker, in part because reason and emotion have been severed, and emotion has become a kind of snare (of shame, guilt, and hatred) in which to fall:

And the Sciences were fixd & the Vortexes began to operate
On all the sons of men & every human soul terrified
At the turning wheels of heaven shrunk away inward withring away
Gaining a New Dominion over all his sons & Daughters
& over the Sons & daughters of Luvah in the horrible Abyss
For Urizen lamented over them in a selfish lamentation
Till a white woof coverd his cold limbs from head to feet
Hair white as snow coverd him in flaky locks terrific
Overspreading his limbs. in pride he wanderd weeping
Clothed in aged venerableness obstinately resolvd
Travelling thro darkness & wherever he traveld a dire Web
Followd behind him as the Web of a Spider dusky & cold
Shivering across from Vortex to Vortex drawn out from his mantle of years

A living Mantle adjoind to his life & growing from his Soul
And the Web of Urizen stre[t]chd direful shivring in clouds
And uttering such woes such bursts such thunderings

Yet in the midst of this gloom, Blake interjects the unexpected image of “eyelids expansive as morning” and ears as “a golden ascent winding round to the heavens of heavens,” a startling juxtaposition that reminds the reader that Urizen chooses the very contraction of the senses that he (and the web of hypocrisy that goes with him) thunderously bemoans. Modern subjects, the passage implies, choose to perceive nature as a barren wilderness (isolated location), and other living beings as poisonous and aggressive, deliberately contracting their attention. Though the senses are formed to open into interrelationship, through intensive attention or visionary ecology, modern subjects identify instead with “their outward forms,” which are “in the Abyss.”

In a strange image, the passage asserts that subjects “open within into Eternity at will,” as if to suggest that one need only attend to the intensity of experience for the senses to follow their

natural tendency toward etho-ecological or more-than-human sympathies. Refusing this open potential, modern agents cleave to their “outward forms.” It is ambiguous, here, whether their outward forms (because located in the abyss) actually prevent the expansion of the senses, or whether subjects “refuse” because they cling unreasonably to the forms of identity and identification made possible by materialist optics:

The eyelids expansive as morning & the Ears
As a golden ascent winding round to the heavens of heavens
Within the dark horrors of the Abysses lion or tyger or scorpion
For every one open within into Eternity at will
But they refused because their outward forms were in the Abyss

Just as Tharmas (the object body) feels himself to be the “food” of Urizen (disembodied mind), so too Urizen limits himself to the passive victim of a recurring re-inscription, “regenerated” as a “dire discontent and living woe”:

He could not take their fetters off for they grew from the soul
Nor could he quench the fires for they flame out from the heart
Nor could he calm the Elements because himself was Subject...
Reorganize me shooting forth in bones & flesh & blood
i am regenerated to fall or rise at will or to remain
A labourer of ages a dire discontent a living woe
Wandering in vain...
For every one open within into Eternity at will
But they refused because their outward forms were in the Abyss...
(*Vala, or The Four Zoas VI, 57-251*)

In pursuing Tharmas, Urizen falls into a materialist mode of perception. He cannot escape the “Body of Man” because the material body “surges forth” in all the generative forms of nature. He too becomes “subject” to the elements and their passions, and regardless of how he is reorganized, through his labors and wanderings, he merely “becomes what he beholds.”

One might argue that Blake implies here, on a literal level, that the transmission of knowledge via books has helped to construct or organize bodies, or to insinuate into sense-experience forms of discursive inscription that perpetuate forms of social power. Individual bodies

may come and go, but the “books” remain, and the modern subject is compelled to take up the “iron pen” of codification:

...then as the seed shoots forth
In pain & sorrow. So the slimy bed his limbs renewed
At first an infant weakness. periods passd he gatherd strength
But still in solitude he sat then rising threw his flight
Onward tho falling thro waste of night & ending in death
And in another resurrection to sorrow & weary travel
But still his books he bore in his strong hands & his iron pen
For when he died they lay beside his grave & when he rose
He siezd them with a gloomy smile for wrapd in his death clothes
He hid them when he slept in death when he revivd the clothes
Were rotted by the winds the books remaind still unconsumd
Still to be written & interleavd with brass & iron & gold
Time after time for such a journey none but iron pens
Can write And adamantine leaves recieve nor can the man who goes
The journey obstinate refuse to write time after time...
(*Vala, or The Four Zoas VI 158-172*)

As I read it, this depiction, in *The Four Zoas*, of Urizen’s descent in pursuit of Tharmas anticipates what recent feminist discourse has called “necropolitics” (Braidotti), or an inscriptive politics of life as information (or biomediation) that emerges from a modern insistence on registering zoe as bare abstract matter (*natura naturata*) rather than active interrelation (*natura naturans*). In other words, Blake anticipates the speculative feminist questioning of the specular optics that has underpinned secular humanism.

Such a questioning has, arguably, grown more urgent than ever today, given the grisly ties between modern spectrality, the bar on etho-ethological subjectivity, and the global ecological crisis.^{xxxviii} Various constructivist thinkers (in political ecology, feminist materialism, and science studies) have been proposing that the global ecological crisis is less some unexpected rupture than the becoming-visible again — as an “intrusion” (Haraway, Stengers) — of an interrelationality that modern optics has hypocritically concealed.

12 Blake's Etho-Ecology: The Eye Altering, Alters All

“Whitehead does not denounce the modern epoch, but speaks of it as of something that must, and will, pass. His diagnosis is also a prognosis. He identifies the weakness, the hesitation, and the confusion concealed by the successes that allow this epoch to be identified with progress, but his weakness, hesitation, and confusion are described in a way that affirms trust: the adventure continues; that is, the incoherence is temporary and ‘epochal’.” (Stengers, TWW 127)

Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through
Eternal Death! and of the awaking to Eternal Life.

This theme calls me in sleep night after night, & ev'ry morn
Awakes me at sun-rise, then I see the Saviour over me
5Spreading his beams of love, & dictating the words of this mild song.

Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!
I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine:
Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land.
(*Jerusalem*, f. 4, ll. 1–8.)

Critical theory becomes ecological activism when it questions the modern bar on etho-ecological attention. Or, one could say, criticism's claim to real-world ecological relevance is its claim to question the bar on “ecological consciousness.” It may seem strange that this particular kind of ethical engagement hinges on a model of aesthetic ontology, which Brian Massumi has called, simply, “activist philosophy.” As I have been arguing, via Whitehead, etho-ecological aesthetics hinges on the question of whether experience really does transform, in the shift from optic to haptic modes of attention.^{xxxix} Do the visitations of the more-than-human world (the world of etho-ecological metaphysics) actually enter attention? If not, then ecocriticism, and romantic poetry, may theorize and lyricize about ecological consciousness, but is of limited value.

For Lussier, much as Blake envisioned in *Jerusalem*, ecological consciousness, at least, is now emerging in both the sciences and the humanities. The “ethical stance” implied in Blake’s efforts “to unveil the insidious potential of the enlightenment episteme at its moment of inception and replace it with an episteme of wholeness,” he writes, is gaining “widespread acceptance, even in the hard sciences from which the enlightenment episteme emerged.”¹⁴⁵ Yet the transition from postmodernism to postsecular (etho-ecological) modernity takes time:

...in some critical assessments of our current "postmodern" condition, the eradication of nature has reached its zenith. For Jameson, "The other of our society is ... no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify" (35). As a symptom of postmodernism, this might be an accurate statement, but Nature, as it were, has re-presented itself with a vengeance in the form of a despoiled ecological system. (407)

One might say, with Latour, that modernity has only ever been a “contract” (or, for Blake, a *contraction* to an isolated center), and that posthumanism has, at least, disrupted that contract.^{x1}

In “Blake, Deleuze, and the Emergence of Ecological Consciousness,” Lussier suggests that “ecocritical discourse” makes “unique demands on theory” (256), igniting transversal couplings such as the “ecological self” and “quantum self,” by which “contemporary physical terms” enter into models of the subject. In “A Motion and a Spirit: Romancing Spinoza,” Marjorie Levinson argues that this kind of interdisciplinary new materialist paradigm has been emerging since the 1960s, in the parallel trends of complex systems theory and materialist theory. I would add that this convergence of science and the humanities is especially prominent in radical empiricist thought (Bergson, James, Peirce, Whitehead, Deleuze), which is marked by a commingling of science (physics, biology, ecology) and philosophy (metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics). Something

¹⁴⁵ His argument about Blake and the postclassical sciences (in “Blake’s Deep Ecology,” 1996) anticipates, and in many ways seems more pertinent than, the argument Levinson later makes (in “Romancing Spinoza,” 2007) about Wordsworth and the postclassical sciences, though both might be said to unfold the implications of the ecocritical turn pioneered by Kroeber and Bate in the early 1990s.

similar was, arguably, occurring in the romantic period, when the porous boundaries between science and poetry were beginning to ossify, and when a poet like Blake was working, precisely, to open an increasingly orthodox materialist optics to poetry's etho-ecological haptics.¹⁴⁶

Again, I would emphasize that the key factor, both for romantic poetry and for the marriage of science and the humanities in integral ecology or "organic realism" (Whitehead), is actually the question of attention. Blake makes this explicit in his recurrent theme that "the Eye altering alters all" (*The Mental Traveller*), but it seems reasonable to suggest that not everyone is as confident as Blake about the actual potential of the eye to alter. Also, though it may be clear to most readers that this alteration depends on a moment of inspiration, it may remain quite unclear whether that inspiration is of the head or the heart. Is it willed imagination, the mental labor to see the world differently? Is it an unexpected change of heart, the sudden conversion from egotism to compassion? And what precipitates inspiration? What exactly causes perception to change?

I would suggest that in Blake the answer is attention. The eye alters when one looks "through" it and not "with" it. To look "with" the eye is to perceive automatically, through the eye as organ of cognition, or as *organizing* optics.¹⁴⁷ To look "through" the eye is to "prehend" or to attend sensitively to haptic interrelations. So, the crucial factor in Blakean inspiration is that it involves a shift in attention, from the normative empiricist mode ("presentational immediacy") to the radical empiricist mode ("causal efficacy"). The former mode narrows metaphysics to the psychological (centered perception), while the latter opens metaphysics to the etho-ecological. The former might be called secular, the latter postsecular. S. Foster Damon comments, learnedly but slightly inscrutably:

¹⁴⁶ One could say that the "ecological consciousness" (257) that Lussier sees Blake promoting is precisely the radical empiricist mode that orthodox empiricism foreclosed.

¹⁴⁷ "The word *perceive* is, in our common usage, shot through and through with the notion of cognitive apprehension" (PR 86).

...one need not be limited to ‘the Vegetated Mortal Eye’s perverted & single vision’ (*J53:11*), if one looks ‘not with but through the eye,’ a phrase which Blake may have taken from Plato’s *Theaetatus*. This ability consists in that spontaneous translating of the visible into human qualities, the process now called ‘empathy’. All the arts are baed on this power. (Damon 134)

Rather than call this ability “empathy,” and rather than vaguely explain it as “the spontaneous translating of the visible into human qualities,” I would suggest calling it etho-ecological *sympathy*, and understanding it as shift from optic to haptic modes of attention. That said, the very notion of a “shift” is problematic, as what is really at stake, I would argue after Whitehead, is the difference between *inattention* and attention. Cognition and consciousness, Whitehead notes, involve convenient forms of subtraction or inattention.¹⁴⁸ To speak of a “shift,” then, is to complicate matters unnecessarily. All that is necessary for inspiration or for “etho-ecological” feeling is attention.¹⁴⁹

Lussier points incisively to the lines from *Milton* about attention’s ever-present potential to undo the optic in the haptic, or to exceed Satan’s policing “Watch Fiends.” If Blake’s “Moment in each day that Satan cannot find” that “renovates every Moment of the Day if right placed” (*J Plate 35:42-45*) seems like one more gnomic utterance, Blake scholars have nevertheless found it entirely consistent with one of his main ongoing themes: the notion that the world is transformatively experienced in its interrelationality, *as* infinite, the moment the centered optics of finitude (cognition) is relaxed.¹⁵⁰ In that sense, the Watch Fiends guard Time or finitude against infinity. They are on the watch against the heresy of sensitivity: the transversal potential of etho-ecological attention.

As Lussier explains, Blake’s Satan is linked to the rational “Spectre,” whose “‘Watch Fiends’ are both perceptual and temporal” (257); that is, Satan is an epistemic regime. Neither Satan nor

¹⁴⁸ In Brian Massumi’s terms, cognition or perception “qualifies” or “captures” affect.

¹⁴⁹ Cognition might be said to *curb* etho-ecological attention.

¹⁵⁰ Or when conceptual perception is relaxed into nonconceptual awareness.

his Watch Fiends can find the moment of deterritorializing attention because it does not exist as an “isolated location” (Whitehead). Hence, only the “Industrious,” or those who actively attend to experience, find this renovating event, in which all occasions are present in each occasion:

The renovation of the “Moment,” the eternal and infinite spacetime of the imagination itself, creates rippling waves of potential transformation, whose panpsychic fibers form, in Deleuzian language, deterritorializing “lines of flight” that defuse “into a single harmonious wave” (257).

In Book 13 of the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth makes a remarkably similar reference to a kind of poetic attention that holds “communion with the invisible world,” and likewise casts it as the industriousness of (not fiendish but unselfish) watchmen:

They build up greatest things
From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
Willing to work and to be wrought upon.
They need not extraordinary calls
To rouse them—in a world of life they live,
By sensible impressions not enthralled,
But quickened, rouzed, and made thereby more fit
To hold communion with the invisible world. (13:98-105)

Though Wordsworth seems to harbor reservations about sensuous attention, as suggested in the line “By sensible impressions not enthralled,” and though his emphasis falls on “higher minds” (or “the philosophic mind”) rather than, with Blake, on the event itself, these differences appear to be more of degree than of kind. Wordsworth’s phrase “least suggestions” hints that “sensible impressions” *might* enthrall if considered mere conscious sensations of pleasure and pain. Yet, viewed as “suggestions” (of nonconscious experience, or of what Whitehead calls “intense experience in dim apprehension”), these same impressions “rouse” and “quicken” the sensitive and attentive mind, hinting at an “invisible” intensity that exceeds conventional sense-

experience. Receptive attention is thus not conditioning or enthralling but deconditioning, fostering a prehensive mode “more fit /To hold communion with the invisible world.”¹⁵¹

One of the difficulties of romantic verse (and perhaps one of the main sources of the critical temptation to emphasize the discontinuities rather than the deeper transversal continuities between Wordsworth and Blake) is that it addresses a mode of experience – communion, or “the commons”¹⁵² – that modern thought relegates to the wishful, impossible, and ideological. Lussier proposes that writing from within this perspective of the event, or of “becoming,” is difficult, precisely because the non-representational is too intensive for forms of representation. Poetry is best suited to this mode of counter-cognition. Poetry deterritorializes attention and opens a “rich zone” of “possibilities”:

If any mode of representation can model this type of interactive and mutual determination, poetry offers the most promise. The condensed nature of verse is governed by metrical oscillations capable of interaction with both the human and more-than-human through the semiotic fibers strung across borderlines that therein constitute lines of flight or of deterritorialization. The poetic environment of William Blake offers a particularly rich zone within which to explore such possibilities... (259)

Here, I would emphasize again the affinities between feminism, constructivism (aesthetic ontology) and ecological theory, which seem to stem from the tendency to associate relation with the feminine and objectification with the masculine. In this context, Lussier traces the deterritorialization of attention,¹⁵³ in Blake’s work, through female figures such as Thel and Oothoon. Ecological consciousness, as Lussier defines it in reading *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, involves (as a first step toward shifting away from patriarchal logocentrism and human exceptionalism) a process of “becoming-woman” that “brings into view a semiospheric ecosom

¹⁵¹ The importance of this word “communion” is also salient in Blake’s phrase, from *Laocoön*: “denying Immediate / Communion with God.”

¹⁵² That is, the commons as invisible (extra-human, etho-ecological, intensive) event, ecosom, or “soul.”

¹⁵³ Or, the undoing of the bar on etho-ecological attention.

teeming with difference and radiating *jouissance* as its steady state” (265)¹⁵⁴ – in other words, the vision of interrelational affection or of the “free love” that the voice of the Earth, in *Songs of Experience*, presents as frozen and chained (“Earth’s Answer”).

To clarify the links between the Blakean and speculative feminist critique of modern optics,¹⁵⁵ it will help to further consider his reading of Thel and Oothoon as figures, respectively, of a metaphysically barred modernity that recoils from deterritorialization and of a post-secular modernity that finds, in deterritorialization, a “radiating *jouissance*.” For Lussier, Oothoon, in contrast to Thel, is a figure of “becoming-woman” who embraces not simply the idea of nonhuman others in a decentered universe but also the idea of an etho-ecological intensivity that exceeds and yet grounds consciousness. Reading Blake’s works progressively, he suggests how – in the tension between *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* – “biosemiotic” conditions “evolve into an “ecocosm” (265), commenting that “[w]hile Thel’s line of deterritorialized flight fails, Oothoon’s nomadic journey succeeds” (265).

To support this reading, one might point to the fact that Oothoon actually inhabits the position of this voice of deterritorialization, at the desublimated threshold or “event horizon” (Lussier, Francois) of the more-than-human. Unlike Thel, she actually voices the counter-epistemological questions that unsettle the epistemic foreclosures that curb etho-ecological experience. Thel flees the gothic voice of life-in-death, which is her own voice from the grave, or the radical alterity that she imagines lies beyond the bounds of the self, when it asks, “Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?”

¹⁵⁴ This resumes an earlier contrast, in the discussion of “Earth’s Answer,” of Thel and Oothoon.

¹⁵⁵ And to better understand how the Blakean view presses ecological consciousness past vitalist-materialist to etho-ecological intensivity (in the sense of sympathy or “love”).

In contrast, Oothoon is given a remarkable number of lines (approximately one hundred in the latter half of the two-hundred-and-seventeen-line poem) with which to “wail,” calling for a new beginning “every morning.” The point she makes is that Theotormon suffers “a sick man’s dream” (170). He rejects her on the basis of a logic of property and ownership; because she has been raped by Bromion, she is “fallen” (used, promiscuous, no longer purely his). In effect, in ways that echo the answer of Earth to the Bard in “Earth’s Answer,” Oothoon diagnoses Theotormon’s perspective as distorted by Urizen, (the modern optics of purification or isolated location) who (a Demon who thinks he is holy) has made men in his image: ““O Urizen! Creator of men! mistaken Demon of heaven! / Thy joys are tears, thy labour vain to form men to thine image” (VDA, 114-15).

Theotormon, notably, puts his faith in thought, but is tormented by an irresolvable uncertainty that stems from his awareness that thought is double-edged in its forked severance from the living moment, and may as soon bring hope for the future as sorrow for the past. Rejecting the present moment as afflictive, he seeks to follow the flight of thought, away from the world, but seems to know all too well that thought perpetuates suffering, meeting the moment with hope or fear but not with actual contact or relationship:

Where goest thou, O thought? to what remote land is thy flight?
If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction,
Wilt thou bring comforts on thy wings, and dews and honey and balm,
Or poison from the desert wilds, from the eyes of the envier?’ (94-97)

By contrast, Oothoon redefines virginity *as* promiscuity, in the affirmative sense of an innocence that is open to interrelation. Embracing the moment, not as the afflictive fact of transgressive desire but as the etho-ecological event, she describes herself as “Open to joy and delight wherever beauty appears.” Thus, she describes the moment of attention to the “morning sun” in terms of a

commingling, or a “happy copulation,” and the moment of evening rest on the river bank as a drawing in of “the pleasures of this free-born joy”:

‘But Oothoon is not so, a virgin fill’d with virgin fancies,
Open to joy and to delight wherever beauty appears:
If in the morning sun I find it, there my eyes are fix’d
In happy copulation; if in evening mild, wearied with work,
Sit on a bank and draw the pleasures of this free-born joy. (172-176)

Though Blake clearly invests Oothoon with an overtly erotic mode of receptivity, or of an openness that delights in being filled not by “virgin fancies” but by commingling pleasures, the point is less to sexualize her than to hint at the connections between sexually repressive social morality, with its policing and possessive logic of purity, and a systemic fear of interrelationship. Her contrast between the moment of “happy copulation” and the onanistic “moment of desire”¹⁵⁶ exposes the way in which the self-engrossed, involuted ego closes itself to relationship, breeding guilt and lust out of repression:

‘The moment of desire! the moment of desire! The virgin
That pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys
In the secret shadows of her chamber: the youth shut up from,
The lustful joy shall forget to generate, and create an amorous image
In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds of his silent pillow. (VDA, 177-81)

Oothoon casts this kind of “pure” virginity as “the self-enjoyings of self-denial”:

Are not these the places of religion, the rewards of continence...
The self-enjoyings of self-denial? Why dost thou seek religion?
Is it because acts are not lovely that thou seekest solitude,
Where the horrible darkness is impressèd with reflections of desire? (182-85)

Rather than blame Theotormon or Bromion, she turns her attention toward Urizen, the cold lawmaker who indirectly produces hypocritical religion, a violence that pities the less fortunate, even as it judges them as fallen or sinful. Pity offers charity from a place of hypocritical purity,

¹⁵⁶ Or the moment in which eros *becomes* grasping desire, *rather than* relational movement, “incipient potential,” or intensivity (Massumi, Manning).

on condition of repentance by the agentless of the promiscuity that has polluted them. By casting relationality as material promiscuity, conventional morality reauthorizes itself, perpetuating the equation of rational self-interest with virtue and of sympathy with sin. Jealous over Oothoon, taking her as private property, Theotormon feels her beauty has been diminished or polluted if her virgin purity has been marked.

As Oothoon decries, the truly accursed thing is this possessive attitude, which reduces her, a voice of interrelation, to an agentless “solitary shadow wailing on the margin of nonentity”:

‘Father of Jealousy, be thou accursèd from the earth!
Why hast thou taught my Theotormon this accursèd thing,
Till beauty fades from off my shoulders, darken’d and cast out,
A solitary shadow wailing on the margin of nonentity?’

But, Oothoon immediately makes it clear that this image of her as a wailing nonentity (to which both Thel in *The Book of Thel* and Earth in *Earth’s Answer* seem reduced) is an image produced by a purifying optics to which she is not confined. She knows herself to be relational, not sinful, as zoe in the sense of unconfined affect rather than brute matter: “I cry: Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain wind!” (190).

In “Blake’s Deep Ecology,” Lussier further explains how for Blake the ethos of “ravenous” self-interest implied in the modern materialist metaphysics of isolated location is naturally transformed by etho-ecological attention, in which the fixed notion of identity is undone. By implication, science only finds its significance in dialogue with poetry:

Newtonianism, a "Science of Despair," is founded "to gratify ravenous Envy" (M 41:15, 17; E 142) and is resisted by the "Laws of Eternity":

. . . know thou: I come to Self Annihilation
Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually
Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee[.]

This position, from Milton, intersects the ethos of otherness offered by the Cloud or Clod in *The Book of Thel*, and it is precisely the principle voiced by Albion, at the conclusion to

Jerusalem, where "Offering of Self for Another" (J 96:21; E 256) becomes the mechanism through which Albion achieves his final visionary state. Shortly after this pronouncement, Blake brings the scientific and the literary into mutual illumination, when "Bacon & Newton & Locke, & Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer . . . conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic" (J 98:9-28; E 257). Only through acknowledging the interpenetration of one with another and all with world can the imagination truly shape a viable cosmological frame. (406)

One of the key points for Lussier is that Blake, from his earliest works, attempted to make visible the extent to which "nature signifies." Imagination in Blake, as Lussier presents it, is a zone of intensity in which more-than-human affections modify the bounded "self" — an "Offering of Self for Another" or of living "not for ourselves" that Lussier links to the awareness of an interrelational language of the senses:

Blake's understanding, early in his career, that "nature signifies" allowed him to position the imagination, rather than reason, as the interpreter and interrogator of that discourse; imagination can act as catalyst at the intersection of mind and matter because, Blake realized, it was a matter to decide rather than a matter that was determined. (401)

Visions of the Daughters of Albion might thus be considered a particularly important juncture in Blake, because it helps to clarify the Blakean relationships between nature, earth, territory, gender, ecology, affect, and imagination.¹⁵⁷ As Lussier argues, the once standard reading of Blake as hostile to nature – based on "ritual recitation of the proverb of hell" (BDE 379) that states "Where man is not nature is barren" – requires reassessment, in part because a poem like *Daughters* foregrounds the ways in which empirical philosophy was a patriarchal and androcentric system that cast the relational or affective (symbolically consigned to the voiceless domain of property: women, chattel, nature) as the merely passional (emotional, instinctual, and sexual) or promiscuous:

Blake, a keen student of mythologies, recognized empirical philosophy as an expression of empire, a colonizing and consuming ideology that, in past manifestations, had cloven the individual from nature through symbolic intervention. For this reason, there is a strong

¹⁵⁷ Blake's posthumanism, and its rejection of nature, differs from anti-essentialist posthumanism, for which there is "no nature." To read Blake is to be invited into a post-secularism that does not doubt (because it experiences) the etho-ecological.

though not unproblematic, feminist strain in Blake's myth (as many before have noted), and in this poem Blake forges a link between capital exploitation of the planet and cultural exploitation of women. Blake's position has been extended by contemporary linkage of these matters. (379)

Commenting on the long-noted links between Blake and ecofeminism (despite feminist critique of Blake's problematic depiction of Vala, "the Shadowy Female" - a triumphant and often vengeful materialist - as mother nature), Lussier helps clarify that Vala is both femininity and nature as perceived, and constructed, through empiricist optics. Thus, the gendering of feeling/relation (as feminine) and of thinking/knowledge (as masculine) is directly linked to the privileging of a "rational" and discrete optic mode of perception (the head) over an "irrational" and more-than-discrete mode of haptic perception (the heart).

Lussier points to a passage in the culmination of *Jerusalem*, when it becomes clear that the interrelational quality that Blake calls "Human" has no "limited location in discrete spacetime" (FQ). Rather, perception of that interrelational quality varies according to contexts and dispositions, which are all themselves facets of "One Man":

According to the subject of discourse & every Word & Every Character Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the Translucence or Opakeness of Nervous fibres such was the variation of Which vary according as the Organs of Perception vary To & Fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each And seeing: according to fitness and order. (J 98:35-40; E 258)

This fibrous interrelation (apparent relative to the "Expansion or Contraction" or "Translucence or Opakeness" of nerve fibers) extends beyond human beings into the "planetary" things of nature, all of which turn out, to intensive or awakened attention, to be etho-ecological relations or human forms:

All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing And then Awakening into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality And I heard the Name of their Emanations they are named Jerusalem (J99:i-5; E 258-59)

In *A Blake Dictionary*, S. Foster Damon writes that “in the final mystical union of all human forms, the name of their Emanations is Jerusalem” (Damon 208). He clarifies that Jerusalem is “the inspiration of all mankind,” “the Divine Vision in every individual,” “communion with God,” and “liberty... a requisite of all society” (206).¹⁵⁸ Another term for Jerusalem, then, might be interrelation, realized, for Blake, in “mutual forgiveness” or the removal of the egoistic bar that Blake calls the “Covering Cherub,” “the final error, the last enemy to be slain” (Damon 93). “The ultimate meaning of the Covering Cherub,” writes Damon, “is the Selfhood (J. 89:10; 96:8)... self-seeking.... the ‘majestic image of Selfhood’... ‘a Human Dragon terrible’” (93). He further explains:

But error is prophetic: it preserves concealed the very thing it denies. The truth becomes petrified into dogma and relegated to ritual; yet these are but the graveclothes, to be cast off when the truth is resurrected. Jerusalem is hidden within the Covering Cherub [which] represents the false dogmas of the Church Militant (94).

Another name for the Covering Cherub, then, might be optic perception, which circumscribes and contracts haptic or etho-ecological prehension. Blake draws on Biblical tradition, and medieval mythopoeic tradition, in casting the optic mode as a state of sleep or ignorance, in which one believes separate selfhood, and the haptic mode as the even to awakening to “love divine”¹⁵⁹ or felt infinite interrelation:

Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!
I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine:
Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land.
(Jerusalem, f. 4, ll. 1–8.)

One could take Blake’s “Fibres of love” as a metaphor, and conclude with Paul Gilmore that romantic aesthetics found a working image of its own material and social effects in the

¹⁵⁸ Damon also comments that “‘Jerusalem’ is both the first and last word of [*Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*], indicating that Blake was concerned, first and last, with Liberty... it is the true religion (57:10); without it ‘Man Is Not’ (96:16)” (Damon 211).

¹⁵⁹ What Dickinson calls “divinest sense.”

convergence, in romantic science, of the nervous system and electricity. The radical intellectuals of the 1790s, such as Thomas Paine, had already seized upon this analogy for an apparently radical politics, in which exciting, rational ideas of liberty could reanimate the body politic, figured as a single nervous system along which electric signals pass. In that sense, Blake might write that “every Word & Every Character Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the Translucence or Opakeness of Nervous fibres” because he wishes to “theorize aesthetic experience through the language of electricity” (Gilmore), and to present¹⁶⁰ poetry in particular as a liberating medium or electric means of transindividual “Brotherhood.” I will return to this question of romantic electricity in my discussion of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, but for the moment I would like to propose the Blake’s “fibres of Love” are *not* inspired by the materialist picture of electrical and neurological networks, or by a growing awareness of the radical power of accelerated forms of mediation to transform political arrangements. At most, Blake invokes the idea of fibers *because* it would speak to that materialist culture. The fibers in that sense do not produce the love, or constitute the network of affective transmissions that, lyrically, one calls love. The finite, or the serial materiality of sheer difference, does not produce a kind of empirical infinite. Rather, as Whitehead suggests, if one abandons the idea of isolated location, in time and space, the infinite just is in the apparently finite.¹⁶¹ As Blake put it, in his annotations to Swedenborg, “If a thing loves, it is infinite.” In this sense, Blake presses past the most radical models of affect and materialism (complex systems theory, vitalist materialism, radical empiricism, speculative realism, and even speculative feminism), in ways that may remind us that our metaphors do not always structure our conceptions of reality; sometimes, they give us ways of talking about an experiential reality beyond words.

¹⁶⁰ As Shelley does in *A Defence of Poetry*.

¹⁶¹ A metaphysics of substance cannot lead to an etho-ecological metaphysics.

Yet, there is a further possibility. It may well be that Blake's "Fibres of love" describe the "suchness" of the world as it appears to etho-ecological attention, or to attention in which the bar on metaphysics has been relaxed. Wordsworth wrote of visitation and of "interfusion," Whitehead of prehension and fluency. Dickinson wrote of a "species... / Invisible, as Music— / But positive, as Sound—" Possibly, she means "Much madness" in the literal sense of seeing something, a flow of things, that "sane" or sanitized perception does not see. That is, etho-ethological intensivity may be more visceral, seething, and strange, than one might guess. This might partly explain the tendency of centered consciousness to misperceive the etho-ecological event as the threat of a radical alterity or stark materiality, an idea explored in Blake and Dickinson's "becoming-insect" poems, the topic to which I now turn.

“The field is now open for the introduction of some new doctrine of organism which may take the place of the materialism with which, since the seventeenth century, science has saddled philosophy... Such a displacement of scientific materialism, if it ever takes place, cannot fail to have important consequences in every field of thought” (SMW 26).

Chapter 4 Counter-Epistemological Humor in Blake and Dickinson

1 Blake and Dickinson: enemies of “God and his Priest and King”

In a study of Blake, why leap across the Atlantic, and forward half a century, to a small town New England poet? Among the more obvious parallels between William Blake and Emily Dickinson are the facts that both lived in obscurity, both were considered more than a little eccentric by their contemporaries, and both exhibited an extremely earthy and independent streak. Most of all, however, both wrote poetry that offers rewards commensurate to one’s willingness to find one’s own optics in question. In effect, both wrote infernal (counter-epistemological, etho-ecological) poetry.^{xli}

Nowhere can one find a more vivid example of infernal humor than in Blake and Dickinson’s “becoming-insect” poems. I would therefore like to contrast their “fly” poems, which poke such excellent fun at the “stark madness” of common “sense.” Blake and Dickinson stand out (with Keats) for their insistence on poetry as the expression of intensivity or “sympoiesis” (Haraway). Their “fly” poems are unique in the precision and economy with which they hilariously expose the extent to which the modern subject (mis)interprets the experience of the etho-ecological event as the threat of a radical alterity.

Before I turn to the “fly” poems, I will touch touch on a few of Blake’s early works to clarify what I mean by infernal or counter-epistemological humor. Perhaps more accessibly, and more

humorously, than any of Blake's other illuminated texts, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* makes the need to join optics with haptics explicit, demonstrating that what looks angelic and heavenly from an optic perspective looks demonic and hellish from a haptic perspective,¹⁶² and vice versa. Here, Blake shows that to write "in the infernal method" is to invite modern rationality to see its own reverse image, as a circumscriptive moral locus that misidentifies its hellish metaphysics of isolation with heaven. Roderick Tweedy offers a lucid summary of how Blake acidly retells the origin stories of isolated modern consciousness.:

"The history of this is written in *Paradise Lost*," observed Blake, "& the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah" (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 5). It was the genius of Blake to counter this interpretation and to expose that in fact precisely the opposite took place: that it was reason that was cast out of eternity (the right hemisphere reality), and that Reason... emerged to present itself as the true "Creator" of linear time, the only "God" of the human brain. Blake radically reinterprets *Paradise Lost* as an externalized account of the historical and psychological struggle between the rationalistic and the emotional, the bodily and imaginative, for control of the human body. According to this reading, Milton's text shows the expulsion of supposedly "demonic" and irrational, intuitive bodily energies from a controlling and ordered heaven. But, Blake observes, this is history merely being written by the victor. The "Devil's account" is that it was Reason which fell from a previously existing imaginative consciousness of reality, and in seizing control of the human psyche the "Reasoning Power" both "usurps" its place and also eclipses this anterior state of being and perception, which it then suppresses into "subconscious" or bodily life. (43-4)

In characteristically ironic and counter-perceptual style, Blake calls reason (the discourse of heavenly purity) "Satan," "hell," or, perhaps most poignantly and insightfully, "sorrow." In Blake, sorrow is also error, the seductive fiction of Selfhood. It "weeps" with the little chimney sweeper, who appears in both the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*. The chimney sweeper, one might note, is not weeping. Rather, quite by accident, he is reminding the callous passerby of their spiritual condition. In actuality, he is calling for work, but is yet too young to pronounce the word "sweep." On first impression, the reader may take him for a prophetic figure enjoining a

¹⁶² The "true" poet's "Devil's party," the party of liberty (MHH).

spiritually hardened people to realize, and feel remorse, for the suffering in which they actually live, and the suffering which they inflict on others:

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying "weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!
"Where are thy father and mother? say?"
"They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery."

(“The Chimney Sweeper: A little black thing among the snow”)

When a passerby asks the chimney sweeper where his parents are, he responds that they “are both gone up to the church to pray.” Here, I would suggest that the boy might be an orphan, and hence takes the phrase “thy father and mother” to mean *all* adults, whose religion is patriarchal power rather than compassion and love. Blake implies that patriarchal power defines itself by denying agency to the disenfranchised, which includes not only humans but animals:

A Robin Red breast in a Cage
Puts all Heaven in a Rage
A Dove house filld with Doves & Pigeons
Shudders Hell thr' all its regions
A dog starvd at his Masters Gate
Predicts the ruin of the State
A Horse misusd upon the Road
Calls to Heaven for Human blood
Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear

“Auguries of Innocence” makes the common sense logic of power, property, and privilege look insane, in ways echoed by Dickinson’s searing distinction between sanity (common sense,

property) and what it sanitizes (relationship, the “commons”).¹⁶³ Affect in the “divinest Sense” of sympathy, or “the feeling of one feeling by another” (Whitehead), is labeled “mad” by the modern world.^{xlii}

For Blake, art is “always revolutionary” (Damon 28). Original artists challenge perceptual regimes. Conventional artists engage in a “pretence of Art to destroy Art” (*J* 43:35). Normative aesthetics (“bad art” and “bad science”) “publishes doubt,” severing objects from relations. A celebrated passage from *Milton* prompts one to see the connections between the cynically conservative attitudes of normative aesthetics, empiricism, and politics.¹⁶⁴

To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration
That it no longer shall dare to mock with aspersions of Madness
Cast on the Inspired, by the tame high finisher of paltry Blots,
Indefinite, or paltry Rhymes; or paltry Harmonies.
Who creeps into State Government like a caterpillar to destroy
To cast off the idiot Questioner who is always questioning,
But never capable of answering...
Who publishes doubt & calls it knowledge; whose Science is Despair...
...he talks of Benevolence & Virtue
And those who act with Benevolence & Virtue, they murder time on time...
Who pretend to Poetry that they may destroy Imagination...
Milton, Plate 41, 7-23

Like Blake, Dickinson strives for a poetry that frees itself from modern optics, so that the haptic speaks. In a sense, both labor to free poetry from that which “may destroy Imagination,” or that which may reduce poetry to ornamentation rather than inspiration, extensivity rather than

¹⁶³ Much Madness is divinest Sense-
To a discerning Eye-
Much Sense – the starkest Madness-
'Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail-
Assent- and you are sane-
Demur- you're straightway dangerous-
And handled with a Chain-

¹⁶⁴ That is, an attitude that refuses to ask into those merely “philosophical” questions that would unsettle its political institutions.

intensity. Dickinson's "discerning eye" is attention that looks through, not with, the eye: poetic attention to a world in process, without bars or bans on commingling sympathies.^{xliii}

Poets like Dickinson and Blake (if they are "legislators" of an alternative modernity) know themselves to be "enemies" in the eyes of the state. Yet, as Goldsmith discusses in *Blake's Enthusiasm*, it remains difficult to assess Blake's political activism. The issue is complicated by the danger, after the 1790s, of openly expressing unsanctioned political views. Neither Blake's work nor his life attest to an interest in political "agitation." He seems to have favored a revolution in perception over a revolution in political parties. Blake's depictions of "Orc," or the youthful impulse toward revolt, tend instead to register the fact that Orc will eventually become Urizen, or assume the image of cold, cruel authority that it opposes.¹⁶⁵

Pointing to the various critical interpretations of one of Blake's best-known paintings, "Glad Day" or "Albion Rising" (to some an image of political revolution, to others of spiritual revolution), Goldsmith questions the image of the doggedly subversive "poet against the empire" into which Blake has been cast by historicists such as Jon Mee and David Erdman. Blake's enthusiasm, he argues, is rather a "critical" enthusiasm, grounded in acts of reading and writing, and the difficulties of critical thought.¹⁶⁶

This is not to suggest that the counter-epistemological poet takes no risk. Dickinson's life and poems suggest an extreme caution in relation to the society of her time and place. And Blake, more obviously, endured public examinations that threatened his existence, whether in the form of

¹⁶⁵ Goldsmith notes, also, that Blake was described by his contemporaries as mild and benign.

¹⁶⁶ Žižek has recently expressed a similar view that critical thought current dirth of meaningful alternatives to transnational capitalism only demonstrates that confidence in the transformative potential of philosophical questioning is itself being undermined today. Instead of turning, with Marx, from theory to practice, he suggests that it is now time to newly recognize the role of fantasy and imagination in our very experience of reality. Haraway, likewise, emphasizes the transformative value of fabulation, and takes as her anthem Virginia Woolf's feminist cry, "We must think."

a sedition trial that could literally lead to execution or in the form of excoriating assessments of his art that could lead to social marginalization and starvation. *The Examiner*, for instance, described him, and his art, as insane, a telling and highly regrettable reaction to one of the rare instances when he took the financial and social risk of public exhibition. The threat of being “handled with a chain” was very real to both Dickinson and Blake, which -- as Virginia Jackson has argued, in Dickinson’s defense -- makes it all the more objectionable to force either poet into the explanatory rubric of an “interior” genre (be it private “lyric” poetry or “visionary” mystic poetry). In so many ways, both speak, as Deleuze does, of “extra-being” rather than the private.¹⁶⁷ Both hold open the possibility of poetic rather than prosaic attention.

2 “They shut me up in Prose” – the deterritorializing levity and multi-species laughter of “becoming-woman”

Instances of extra-being, and of the difficulty that modern optics has with the encounter with extra-being, the “becoming-insect” (Braidotti) poems by Blake and Dickinson run along remarkably parallel lines. As I will explore in the next section (7.3), both dramatize the strange

¹⁶⁷ To voice extra-being was dangerous for these counter-epistemological poets *because* to do so was to offend “God” or to threaten the privileged metaphysical center. Any threat against that paranoid, sovereign center (which defines itself as human, universal, and rational) must be interpreted *as* the infernal threat of the less-than-human, or of bare life. In that sense, one cannot simply say that the romantics championed metaphysics after its modern repudiation, because modernity aggressively *defends* its own metaphysics. The challenge is to see that modernity claims privileged metaphysical status *only* for the rational and objective observer (as defined by the self-authorizing few), and denies metaphysical status to what Latour calls the “middle kingdom” of nonhuman agents. In this context what I mean by metaphysical status is, simply, subjectivity: the status of being-in-relation, or of *feeling*. Modernity, as Braidotti suggests, splits zoe into natural sweetness (reserved as private property at the core of the citizen) and bare life, or into *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

encounter of an attenuated speaker and a buzzing fly. First I would like to tarry with Dickinson's *They shut me up in Prose and I tie my Hat — I crease my Shawl*, which vitally expresses the brand of counter-epistemological humor with which Dickinson and Blake laugh at the blinkered doubt implicit in the notion of an exceptional consciousness marked out by epistemic limits:

They shut me up in Prose –
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they liked me “still” –
Still! Could themselves have peeped –
And seen my Brain – go round –
They might as well have lodged a Bird
For Treason – in the Pound –
Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Look down upon Captivity –
And laugh – No more have I –

With the surprising leap into a more-than-modern situation, characteristic of the opening line of Dickinson poems, “They shut me up in Prose –” delivers the kind of slap in the face to modernity that the voice of Earth delivers to the “Bard” in “Earth’s Answer” (see 2.ii). The opening phrase, “shut me up,” implies both the silencing of a voice and the constraint of a body, yet the locus in which both voice and body are confined is a mode of discourse, “Prose,” which Dickinson has cast elsewhere (“I dwell in Possibility”) as the foreclosure of “possibility” by fragmenting, manmade structures.

Notably, it remains unclear *when* this shutting up happened. The syntax of the lines “As when a little Girl / They put me in the Closet” leaves it ambiguous as to whether she is making a comparison (this present event is like that past event) or giving an example (this was one instance of my being shut up). What remains constant, instead, is the bizarre and abrupt brutality that links lines such as “They shut me up in Prose” to “They put me in a Closet.” By the end of this poem of

“becoming-woman,” we realize, however, that these abusive acts must have occurred in the past, because the very existence of the poem (in excess of prosaic logic) proves she survived intact.

If the poem rejects both the closet of prose and the “captivity” of modern common sense, it does so through a series of conceits, linking the imaginative mode of a child’s mind (presumably, her own, in girlhood) to more-than-terrestrial figures, a bird or a star, that cannot be confined in an isolated location or a conventional self. Arguably, the metaphors of bird and star do not signal astral transcendence here so much as the deterritorializing element of air or space, inducing a dislocating sense of existing nowhere or of being radically free of determinate attributes.

The bird or star are hyper-relational or super-positional figures, linked to a profoundly uncanny levity. A star is an energetic body that bursts from within its own non-identical form and floats above dense matter and limited ideas. A bird is an intensely active maker of unselfconscious melodies which, paradoxically, when caged sings of its freedom. The nature of a bird or star cannot be adequately explained in prose. Likewise, though (presumably) adults attempt to confine the speaker within the determinate discourse of 19th Century identity (gender, class, region, race, species), she escapes them because she never exists in the first place in, and never internalized, determinate discourse. The silencing attempt to shut a “me” up in prose fails because she “no more” has “I.”

The conceit of lodging a bird in a pound for treason is ludicrous not only because birds are incapable of treason but also because a pound (designed for human beings) cannot contain a small winged thing. Arguably, part of the logic of this metaphor is that conventional (centered humanist) subjects are trapped by the very constructions by which they define themselves against the more-than-human. To go free of the human center is go free also of the very notion of treason and

confinement. Nonhuman, the bird easily escapes the (perhaps roofless) bars. As such, the bird is a figure for zoe, or life unconfined by, or undefined by, the exceptional human center.

The final metaphor, which transforms the bird into a star, suggests that the bird is in fact a winged vibratory movement unconfined by time and matter. The “captivity” it looks down on, wonderfully, is the prosaic captivity of having an identity. What is most extraordinary is that there is no preparation for this final yet open-ended implication of the poem. Formally, the poem subverts the cognitive tendency to seek closure, even as it invites what may well be a much more vital drive or need of the embodied mind toward a mode of intensivity akin to dreaming, or toward an apprehension of interrelation that relaxes, and remedies, the fragmentary forms of identification that promise psychological security but only deepen ontological anxiety and social division. The openness of the poem’s ending intensifies the reader’s awareness that, from its opening lines, it communicates with foreclosure in ways that are as sudden and darting as a bird. This is, indeed, the startling quality of nearly all of Dickinson’s verse. Always, from the onset, it is as though language is breaching not expressing thought, with a radically disorienting trajectory that Margaret Freeman has described as an opening, and even explosive un-lidding, of containment metaphors.

Ominous as its opening lines (“They shut me up in Prose —”) may sound, the poem is about joyous levity, a laughter of no-essence that does not mock the jailers so much as laugh, with delight, at the discovery that there is nothing – or no one – to contain (or cling to):

look down upon Captivity —
And laugh — No more have I—

A kind of treason *is* committed — the treason of not having/being a conventional self in a world of conventional selves. Yet the freedom implied is not a possession of the speaker — nor is this a poet’s boast about aesthetic elevation or refinement. Instead, the poem is clearly an invitation into the open-endedness (not prose but poetry) that liberates and delights.

There are no periods in the poem, just quantum dashes, high-energy transitions from one state to another, leaps into metaphor that boggle and escape determinate logic but that catalyze perception or insight. The first stanza ends by questioning stillness (isolated location, identity), the second with the absurd idea of a caging a bird for treason (in a cage that cannot contain its quick form), and the third, most radically, with a “laugh” and with the joyous proposition: “—No more have I—”¹⁶⁸ One might read this, too literally, to mean the bird/girl is laughing, “You don’t have me anymore,” but the syntax of the poem, and formal elements such as its punctuation, clearly implies the centerless, remarkable perception, “I realized I was free of identity.”

The tripartite structure of the poem seems to accomplish something analogous to the tripartite structure that Johnson discerns in the dream-vision of the Arab in Book V of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*: “The divisions exhaust the various ways in which time and eternity can relate to one another. There is a progression from a landscape of time to one of eternity in relation to time; then eternity itself is celebrated; finally, time in relation to eternity is placed against all that precedes it...” (Johnson 87). The first stanza of “They shut me up in Prose—” might be understood to concern time or identity, the second to concern the movement that exceeds time or identity, and the third to concern the laughter of a “timeless” state uncontained by time or identity (which, because it is uncontained by time, has no argument with, and in fact is directly present, in time).

A possible line of contrast here between Wordsworth and Dickinson, then, is that in Wordsworth the use of golden sections (which Johnson discerns in key passages of *Tintern Abbey*, *The Prelude*, and *The Excursion*) reflect a movement from time to eternity and back to time that reserves the most total immersion in eternity for the central movement. Johnson notes, “In all three instances, the poems begin and end in the realm of time, and the passages in continuous proportion

¹⁶⁸ Which, from another point of view, might seem alarming.

are so designed that the purest evocations of eternity are in the central sections” (95). By contrast, Dickinson seems to superimpose timelessness *upon* time to achieve uncanny effects, as in *I tie my Hat — I crease my Shawl —*, in which it becomes increasingly clear that there is no “I” to which to attribute these quotidian, conventional, and gendered actions. The reader comes to see that they mistakenly impute an “I” on the basis of a designation that is merely a linguistic convention, when in fact the speaker is curiously non-existent (in the ordinary sense): “And yet — Existence — some way back— / Stopped — struck — my ticking — through —”

That is, in Dickinson, in contrast to Wordsworth, there is no “back again.”¹⁶⁹ As the speaker of *I tie my Hat — I crease my Shawl —* informs us, she is through with ticking, or with time. Psychologically, time and identity have ceased for her; she does not identify with the limited and passing characteristics and conventions that might constitute her as a subject. In “They shut me up in Prose —”, likewise, she does not offer the return to time and identity that Wordsworth offers. Yet, if one looks carefully at a central poem like *I tie my Hat — I crease my Shawl —*, it quickly becomes clear that the speaker has no argument with time precisely because time has no effect on her:

I tie my Hat — I crease my Shawl —
Life's little duties do — precisely —
As the very least
Were infinite — to me —

Time does not affect the way she understands who she is. She dutifully fulfills all the social conventions in which she is granted an identity and place for others, without for a moment falling into the deluded idea that these conventions are real, or that they define her. She wears the expected garments in the expected ways, and does “Life’s little duties... precisely,” as if “the very least /

¹⁶⁹ Even for Wordsworth, the “back again” is, obviously, quite a different place than the starting point.

Were infinite — to me —” because, it seems, the infinite is present to her in all the details; the defamiliarizing and dislocated view is present right there in the familiar experience.

By implication, there is nothing to *add* to what is already infinite (regardless of how localized the familiar may seem to others). She does not count time because, in Anne-Lise Francois’s phrase, she is involved in “uncounted experience.” Rather, she “weighs” time as if it is a material portion that remains constant from day to day. The time until six o’clock is like so much flour in a cake recipe. Time is also measured in the fact that the “Glass” (a rather translucent name for a vase) requires “new Blossoms,” and in the fact that a petal has fallen from a tree or flower. The petal has anchored in her gown, but in fact the anchorage is passing. Time’s flow is an outward show or display in which things passingly materialize, or, simply, time is as unreal as the things it materializes:

I put new Blossoms in the Glass —
And throw the old — away —
I push a petal from my Gown
That anchored there — I weigh
The time ’twill be till six o’clock
So much I have to do —
And yet — existence — some way back —
Stopped — struck — my ticking — through —

Yet, if time seems innocuous to the speaker, her continued participation in time is the “stinging work” of “simulation.” She may have completed the “errand,” which means perhaps that she has fully arrived at the awareness without the ego that, one might conjecture, on the basis of many of her poems, seems to be the goal of entering into bodily experience.¹⁷⁰ The speaker – a “We” or an

¹⁷⁰ One could, of course, comment on the strange notion of rebirth that makes an appearance in *Each Life Converges to some Centre*—. On the basis of this poem, and many others, one might suppose that Dickinson definitely believes that each life has a spiritual goal. Most likely, that goal is, as Kathleen Peterson suggests in *Supposed Person: Emily Dickinson and the Selflessness of Poetry*, is awareness without the ego.

“Oursel,” not a “Man” or “Woman” – says, “We cannot put Oursel away” after this radical dislocation of conventional perception. The “errand” may be done,¹⁷¹ but there are still “Miles on Miles” of this “Nought,” and of painfully extensive action:¹⁷²

We cannot put Oursel away
As a completed Man
Or Woman — When the errand's done
We came to Flesh — upon —
There may be — Miles on Miles of Nought —
Of Action — sicker far —

Here the poem addresses the question of *why* one has to go on simulating conventional identity. The speaker implies (again, employing the plural pronoun to refer to herself) that there is a need to “cover what we are” from a narrow modern optics that would be alarmed by such a loss of center. One might recall Dickinson’s own voluntary seclusion, which may have been a wise choice, even if the witch trials in nearby Salem were a century and a half gone, considering that people who are too perceptive have rarely been welcome in any society. The reference to “Surgery” may signal the danger of a medicalization of her psychological state by others who would view her through a normative and sanitizing optics. To her, it seems, she would be a kind of strange alien body, viewed through a telescope, but too bright for the cold and distanced eyes that gaze on her. Therefore, she “shades” herself: “For their — sake — Not for Ours—”:

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 —

¹⁷¹ Ostensibly, the errand of dipping into time, to experience what it is to be an identity, only to recognize timelessness again. This notion of descending from the spiritual to the material world, for the sake of integration, is also a prominent feature of Blake’s *Milton*.

¹⁷² Alternatively, one might read “Miles on Miles of Nought” in a light and humorous sense, as if the speaker already views what is to come with perfect equanimity, though the phrase “sicker far” seems to forebode actual suffering.

In other words, she does not wish to draw unwanted attention from others, who would not only view her as a freak, but scrutinize her all the more.

The concluding lines of the poem affirm, nonetheless, that the speaker considers herself to have completed life's errand and found its reward. Apparently, this reward involves "completeness" in the sense of there being nothing to add or take away; this shift of identification from time to timelessness, or from the centered to the centerless, seems to involve a profound acceptance and imperturbability, if not tranquility. By this point, the "I" of the poem's opening lines has been completely abandoned for the pronoun "We," or for a sense of extrabeing without isolated location or determinate definition. This shift of pronouns signals a shift from time-dependent consciousness to an awareness unbounded by time.

Yet the "Therefore" with which the last stanza begins also signals full awareness, and certainty, about why the speaker lives as she lives and does as she does. She treats the finite as if it were infinite, without impatience, because there is no goal to reach. A goal implies time, and the mistaken psychological belief – or "specious reasoning" (Borges) – that one's purpose is to improve oneself through time. Considering that one must die, and that death can occur long before one has achieved all of one's temporal goals, an identification with personal development merely indicates a misconstrual of time. Her "Reward" paradoxically is to be without goal, or to know, directly and experientially, that the goal is also the origin, which is not removed in space and time, but infinite in the sense that all actual occasions are present or implicate in each actual occasion, in etho-ecological "entwined mutual prehension."

Understanding her nature as goalless, and without even the goal to display this no-self to others (except through the "shaded" medium of poetry), she takes care of the part of her life that

is in time with “scrupulous exactness.” By implication, the speaker patiently attends to details less to gain something from life, or to cling to it egoistically, than to take care of it, without ego:

Therefore — we do life's labor —
Though life's Reward — be done —
With scrupulous exactness —
To hold our Senses — on —
F522 (1863) J443

The phrase “To hold our Senses—on—” suggests a recognition of the requirements of bodily existence. What is curious is, perhaps, that the speaker actually never expresses urgent longing for a next life. All she tells us is she has already arrived at the reward or goal. One might infer that she no longer needs, or understands herself to be limited to, bodily experience. Yet, surely there is a great deal of humor in that final line, which seems to hint, very strangely (in ways that may resonate with *I heard a Fly buzz - when I died*), at awareness without the senses and without the body. It is as if, without the deliberate effort to hold her senses on, the speaker would float away, perhaps less like an untethered helium balloon than like a vastness, a weightlessness, no longer held in a limited container.^{xliv}

Winkingly, the poem ends with an open-ended preposition, “on” (a word that implies continuity or ongoingness), framed in the most open-ended punctuation, two dashes. A reader might experience this as vertiginous and disorienting, as if reference points are merely relative and provisional, but might equally experience it as beautiful, opening into wonder and trust in something larger than consciousness. By implication (in ways that speak to the very nature of poetic composition), the speaker (“we”) attends to details, and holds “our” senses on, precisely because awareness is without bar our bound.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ This is borne out by one of her most famous poems, which contrasts the “Brain” (arguably here not the physical organ, as a neuroscientist might like to think, but awareness itself) and “God”:

3 Becoming-Insect in Blake and Dickinson

i. The feeling of extra-being

Perhaps the most strangely familiar feeling with which romantic poetry presents us is the feeling of extra-being, in which centered perception (the commonsense and conventional “I”) is absent.¹⁷⁴ Attention loses its circumscription and flows with extra-bodily, centerless intensity. Keats seems to allude to this kind of etho-ecological experience in his letters, communicating the importance to him of those moments when he has “no identical nature”; he sees the sparrow out his window and “take[s] part in its existence and pick[s] the Gravel.” When he enters a room, “the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon [him] that , [he is] in a very little time annihilated.” (“Letter to Richard Woodhouse,” October 27th, 1818).¹⁷⁵

The Brain — is wider than the Sky —
For — put them side by side —
The one the other will contain
With ease — and You — beside —

The Brain is deeper than the sea —
For — hold them — Blue to Blue —
The one the other will absorb —
As Sponges — Buckets — do —

The Brain is just the weight of God —
For — Heft them — Pound for Pound —
And they will differ — if they do —
As Syllable from Sound —

¹⁷⁴ The notion of extra-being, perhaps, brings out the most radical implications of “negative capability” (which Keats’s links to a counter-cognitive mode of half-knowing, or obliterating sense of beauty), implying etho-ecological sympathy or sympoiesis.

¹⁷⁵ Like Keats, Dickinson practiced an ecopoetics of “recessive action” and “uncounted experience” (Francois); in her poetry, attention coincides with the attenuation of the human at the humming threshold of etho-ecological intensity. Critics remain baffled by her references to “the noiseless noise in the orchard that [she] let persons hear” or to pushing her dimples to see if it might bring “conviction” back of “me.” I situate her as a successor to British Romantic ecopoetics, even more self-attenuated than Blake,

How deterritorializing can etho-ecological relation be? What happens when it leads not up to sublime totality but down to the buzz of vibrant matter, the hum of the virtual? Is this a “loss” of the human center in the nonhuman, or simply the relaxation of an artificial demarcation? Blake and Dickinson’s humorous counter-epistemological becoming-insect poems answer these questions, poking fun at a modern sensationalist epistemology that fears and guards against the chaos and contagion of tender interrelation. In one poem, the speaker comes to mistakenly identify himself with a mindless fly, in the other the speaker misidentifies the vibrancy of matter with the buzzing of a fly. Both speakers commit these strange miscognitions because they are confined in an instrumental optics of finitude and self-interest that compels them to conceive of death (or the absence of the center) in terms of oblivion rather than infinity.

If romantic poetry expresses what it is to encounter the world in the prehensive and haptic mode, at the humming threshold of the more-than-human, it does so against the remarkable force of modern epistemic limits that function as intersubjective limits (Yousef). If it expresses what Anne-Lise Francois calls “uncounted experience,” it does so through intense aesthetic strategies that subvert the epistemic bar on etho-ecological interrelation. Francois registers how romantic writing opens the ‘event’ of aesthetic representation, in a “desublimating” process of lessening, attenuation, unbinding, and virtualization, a “lyric of in consequence” (45) receding to the threshold of “uncounted experience” (Francois 18). She links this lessening of the human and the knowable, this *move toward beauty rather than toward the sublime*, or toward the powerless rather than the powerful, to an “ethos of affirmative reticence and recessive action.” Here, Spinoza’s ethics comes to mind. What could be more deterritorializing yet etho-ecological than Spinoza’s account of imagination as the awareness of “external bodies as present in us” (*The Deleuze Connections* 23)

who declares knowledge a “false Body” or “Incrustation,” and Keats who “pick[s] the Gravel” with the sparrow.

or his notion that to imagine is to be subject to the “immanence of other powers in the compositions of ourselves” (The Deleuze Connections 28)?

Is the buzz just such an immanence: the speech of the “virtual” in the quieting of the “actual”? If one approaches the virtual through counter-cognition, can such an approach leave the cognizer intact? Can one prehend intensivity without mortal danger to the “knower?” Can one trust sense-reception, even when it appears to involve the loss of the center? The answer, for these etho-ecological poets, would undoubtedly be yes.

Yet, if poetry holds this counter-cognitive potential for both poets, then *why* these fly poems? How do these distinctly unredemptive “becoming-insect” poems illustrate Blake’s claim that poetry offers a means to put off this “false Body” or “Incrustation,” and “bathe in the waters of Life,” or Dickinson’s suggestion that poetry offers a means to “dwell in possibility” (beyond confinement) and “gather paradise”? The answer, I would suggest again, lies in the intensity, in these poems, of the deterritorializing drive toward the virtual. At the same time, these poems function as satires, which dramatize the tragicomic nature of the modern subjects’ misperception of the etho-ecological as a threatening alterity.

A curious parallelism joins these poems about the strange encounter of an attenuated speaker and a buzzing fly, which I will attempt to tease apart.

ii. “I heard a Fly buzz”

In Dickinson’s *I heard a Fly buzz - when I died*, a disembodied (and, yes, dead) speaker recounts how, in dying, the buzzing of a fly interposed itself between her and the ultimate

experience. Her expectations, and ours, are “dashed” (pun intended). Instead of an “I” in its culminating moment of light and absolute identity, we meet a gently uncanny, almost alien speaker, who has lessened toward an “eventless horizon” (Francois).

This “unknown”¹⁷⁶ speaker recounts their last known experience: being on a deathbed, surrounded by a rather ridiculous storm of people, who are objectified as "Eyes" that "had wrung them dry" and "Breaths" that "were gathering firm." These disembodied spectators are waiting for the great event, "For that last Onset - when the King / Be witnessed - in the Room -" But is the anticipated "King" god or death? All that seems certain is that death and the presence of this kind are coincident. At the same time, the grotesquely metonymical wrung out eyes and heaving breasts in the room also seem indirectly involved, and perhaps invested, in the speaker's final act of giving away parts of themselves. They are witnesses, perhaps celebrants, of a ritual dismemberment and consumption, as the dying person signs away "portion[s] of me": "I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away / What portion of me be / Assignable -" Only then, to the non-assignable remainder, does the buzzing fly come, 'interposing' itself "Between the light - and me -"

Like the speaker of Blake's *The Fly* (as we will see), the speaker of *I heard a Fly buzz - when I died* experiences a kind of accidental identification with a fly, and becomes absorbed into its mindless buzz. Both speakers, it is important to note, are blatantly unreliable. Indeed, the meaning of both poems hinges on strategies to provoke awareness of that unreliability. Blake's poem uses tone, and an overt simplicity of both language and logic, to highlight, from the start, the speciousness of its speaker. Dickinson's poem is a bit more dislocating and uncanny: the speaker herself seems to be unable to recognize that she speaks, as it were, from the other side, or that, precisely, the dead can no longer speak of an I.

¹⁷⁶ Unknown in terms of gender, age, and other attributes, but also unknown in terms of *kind* - or literally a voice of the unknown.

The poem hinges, one could say, on a cognitive aporia. Given that logical disjunction, one may not be able to fully trust the speaker. One cannot really be sure that the "Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -" that she reports really *is* that of a fly. I would argue that it becomes productive to ask whether Dickinson's speaker is still, in some sense, refusing to die, and hence refusing to interpret the buzzing for what it really is, the vibrant threshold at which the self dissolves. One could say that she willfully misinterprets it in terms of the insistence of the stubbornly quotidian. That said, the cues of unreliable narration are subtle, and might be difficult to establish, were it not for the peculiarity of the opening line, "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -", introducing radical uncertainty into questions like "who" and "where," to which one one would apparently have to answer, no one, nowhere.

When the windows "fail" and the speaker cannot "see to see," one is invited into an uncanny awareness: the poem's speaker is speaking to us from beyond death. This speaker has no "windows" or organs of perception, and so they cannot "see," but apparently they still have the capacity of perception. One has to read this as comedy. It might be read as a parody of the belief in mortality, against all evidence of immortality. The speaker believes in mortality, and believes she is dead. At the same time, she still speaks of an "I." The reader is pressed to reflect that the "I" may well have died, but awareness has continued. More than that, however, the point may be that the speaker fails to recognize this distinction between the I and awareness. On one hand, it is clear that she still has not come to terms with the fact that she did not achieve absolute identity with the sublime light; on the other hand, she seems to miss the key fact that the negation of centered identity is vibrant awareness.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ The poem might hinge, in that sense, on a misinterpretation or miscognition on the part of the speaker, who clings to idea that the vibrant hum (of etho-ecological intensivity) was the buzzing of a fly.

Dickinson, in this way, dramatizes the bizarre logic of an "I" that holds itself apart from the ever-present, ever-pressing not-I. This satire, as I have already indicated, is expressed with extreme economy in the opening lines of one of her best known poems: "Much Madness is divinest Sense - /To a discerning Eye -/ Much Sense - the starkest Madness —" Her critique of *the imposition of sense upon sensation* is not an isolated moment of witty poetic protest, but an insistent dimension, and even a formal principle, of her verse, which drives toward the intensive. Her poetics is less idiosyncratic, stuttering, and stoic than humorous, counter-epistemological, and embodied. She deterritorializes "sense" the socially constituted knower or "starkest madness" of having "much [common] sense" in order to unbar the "divinest sense" of interrelations. In doing so, she also cracks open art and the aesthetic to extra-being.

iii. "Am not I / A fly like thee?"

Blake's *The Fly* likewise presents us with the absurd implications of the optics of finitude. For the poem's empiricist speaker, human life and insect life become equivalent, a mindless buzz; he cannot deviate from scientific materialism's insistence on a world built up from "lowest common denominators." His voice, fungible with all the voices of the *Songs of Experience*, is that of a mentally constricted modern agent who, having negligently killed a fly, is thinking through the moral and existential implications of his murderous act. Because he is a Lockean subject, in a mechanistic-Deistic universe, he quickly realizes that he is a fly. That is, he wholly identifies with the fly, and can find no grounds for thinking that a human being differs, in any way, from a fly,

which he conceives extensively as a kind of blind mechanism determined in its movements by sensations of pain and pleasure. Like the parodic syllogism of Blake's *There Is No Natural Religion*, the poem pokes fun at the violent absurdity of Lockean epistemology.

Cut off from infinite sympathies by his epistemic stance, *The Fly*'s speaker cannot help but reduce himself to the humming chaos of non-life or of inert matter.^{178xlv} He is in fact strangely equivalent to the fly, in that the buzz of isolated, arbitrary matter is perceived via contracted senses that also take consciousness for a radically atomistic phenomenon.¹⁷⁹ In that sense, the fly is one more troubling figure for the discursive "I," a "Spectre,"¹⁸⁰ "Negation,"¹⁸¹ "covering cherub," or "opacity" (Satan) that limits vision to inert matter. Blake sees this Lockean agent as human imagination in its most "fallen" form, confined by its own optics to a world of mechanism, conceived as a nested series of "blind" hands.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ By contrast, in Dickinson, the fly represents the buzz of vibrant matter, an active infinity that the "I" with its willed properties has labored to stave off, with absurd and poignant consequences. Even in death, this bewildered "I" misrecognizes an infinity it cannot accept it has entered.

¹⁷⁹ Blake associated this contraction, which evacuated experience of sympathy, with two limits: Adam (the bodily limit of contraction) and Satan (the disembodied mental limit of opacity). The frozen Deist universe or "materialist tyranny" (Frye) left one contracted to an isolated individual in the "mundane shell" (brain/objectified planet), with a dark or "opaque" rational consciousness.

¹⁸⁰ The kind of isolating private psychology that Blake called the "Spectre" is exemplified in Adam Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, which anticipates modern "private" psychology, explaining sympathy as a rational (self-interested, calculative, projective) act. Smith, in effect, links "sense" with "sanity." Sanity is the proper curbing of sense. To be sane is to be sanitary: to seal oneself off from the contagion of sympathy (which existed, uncomfortably, on a continuum with, enthusiasm).

¹⁸¹ For Blake, the Negation, or rational 'I', is an optics that circumscribes clear and distinct ideas or images, while the "Contrary," or imaginative vision, breaches the image to encounter the relations that detached knower negates. Blake describes the rational identity as the "Negation" precisely because it polices and negates the life outside of normative identity and institutional discourse. Taking its model from the laboratory, it reduces the world of sense-impressions to discrete units.

¹⁸² This dark situation is a "mercy" because atomistic individuality is the furthest limit of contraction ("Consolidated Error"), which makes its expansive alternative more obvious. That said, for Blake, expansion (inspiration, vision, imagination) does not mean more robust mental projection. Poetic "vision" or etho-ecological attention occurs in the relaxation of policing, finite "sense," or whenever the "mind-forg'd manacles" are seen for what they are. Dickinson's terms make this strikingly clear: "much sense" implies the "starkest madness" or the policing of felt interrelation.

On the whole, *Songs of Experience* communicates the self-duplicity and self-contradiction of modern adult consciousness.^{xlvi} Yet, strangely, *The Fly's* accompanying engraving evokes innocence: a scene of “summer play” set amid green branches, with a nurse and a toddler in the foreground, and a girl with a racket about to hit a birdy in the background. Immediately, the reader experiences “affective dissonance” (Goodman). As we get to know the speaker, it seems that he is actually an adult male, not figured in the engraving. His absence from the scene could imply that he is a distanced, disjointed observer, never really present in the world. Possibly, he is watching the pastoral scene from afar, reflecting on the meaninglessness of “summer play” and focusing rather morbidly on a dim-witted line of philosophical speculation: *what if those children, enjoying themselves over there, accidentally kill a fly?* All in all, he certainly seems to belong to the songs of experience. He refers to himself as a man, not a child, and alludes to dancing, drinking, and singing. In fact, though he seems like an innocuous hedonist and deist, he is one of the most short-sighted and troubling of all Blake’s speakers. The first thing to note is the speaker’s awareness of orders of magnitude (from little fly, to human hand, to hand-writ-large):

Little Fly
Thy summer's play,
My thoughtless hand
Has brush'd away.

One does not tend to associate flies with such cuteness and innocence. The epithet “little” in the phrase little fly seems a peculiar term of endearment. (Is the speaker drunk and maudlin? Or, is he a child? Then, why does he call himself a man?). The fly is a little thing at summer play, whose life is apparently so fragile, carefree, and unself-conscious as to be blotted out by the desultory sweep of a “thoughtless hand.” One might wonder whether it is a soft, silent fruit fly rather than the sort of obnoxious blue bottle seriously at work in the Dickinson poem.

The matter of scale comes in because, just as the fly's summer's play is presumably thoughtless, so too is the casual, random action of the larger human hand. The corporeal hand does what it does haphazardly, with as little intention as the fly at its play. The hand is on a par with the fly, as zoe or bare, brute matter, and it is inconsequential if it destroys the fly: everything in material nature moves intentionlessly toward sheer annihilation. That is one way of reading the poem. Alternatively, one could argue that there is something wrong with this thoughtless hand — that the speaker has caught himself, guilty of insensitivity toward life:

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

The thought process seems childlike, but there's a ludicrousness in asking the fly this rhetorical question: aren't I a fly, and aren't you a man? The speaker seems less concerned with sensitivity toward life than with a kind of apathetic, callous pseudo-philosophy.¹⁸³ The concern is legitimate: though: *I've just killed a bug, and suddenly I realize it's a living thing, just like me, and that it was minding its own business, just as I am.* But Blake is taking enlightenment style moral philosophy, and its logic, to the point of absurdity: *I may be completely alienated from other living things, but by exercising cold logic I can, as an impartial spectator, reach certain conclusions.*

Behind the rationality and apparent social concern of this brand of Smithian moral philosophy, one finds a kind of demoralized existentialism, or a reconciliation to the fact that experience is private and the world meaningless. Unable to trust his feelings, the Smithian agent installs an impartial spectator in his mind, to calculate the appropriate social response to the pain

¹⁸³ If Wordsworth and Coleridge expressed their concern over the spread of this sort of blasé epicureanism after the French Revolution, Blake seems more forceful in his critique of its life-destroying effects.

and pleasure of other beings, which it can only infer based on its own limited experience. Each mind is locked up in its own private world of discrete sensation. Rational citizens exercise polite sympathy, but only because social behavior is necessary to self-preservation. A logic of fear and self-interest surfaces. (*Maybe I should feel compassion for this fly I just killed, because it probably wanted the same things I want: to go on doing what it is doing without being randomly obliterated*).

Smithian moral sentiment is not compassion but calculation, as Shelley implies in his “Defence of Poetry”:

Undoubtedly the promoters of utility, in this limited sense, have their appointed office in society... But whilst the sceptic destroys gross superstitions, let him spare to deface, as some of the French writers have defaced, the eternal truths charactered upon the imaginations of men. Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines labor, let them beware that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and want. They have exemplified the saying, “To him that hath, more shall be given; and from him that hath not, the little that he hath shall be taken away.” The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of the State is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism. Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty.

In other words, Blake’s *The Fly* may seem like a lesser poetic exercise, but in fact is an extremely focused inquiry into the instrumental logic of modernity. What it demonstrates, above all perhaps, are the mental blocks that prevent the modern agent from approaching the haptic or etho-ecological.

Only superficially does Blake’s speaker collapse the distance between the mere fly and the rational enlightened agent. There’s a kind of double vision here. One on hand, the speaker becomes insect and the insect becomes speaker; on the other hand, the rational enlightened subject reduces himself (and others) to the mindless mechanism he takes the fly to be. (*If I’m nothing but a buzzing, self-interested sensorium like you, little fly, then aren’t we the same?*) On one hand, there is a kind of intimacy with the nonhuman; on the other hand, there is dehumanization, or the utmost

spectatorial distance. All the speaker is really doing is reducing himself to a deterministic machine, a wind-up toy in a world where god is not necessarily so much a sadistic little kid as an oblivious and abstract “Nobodaddy”:

For I dance
And drink & sing;
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

Dancing, drinking, and singing imply a kind of mindless intoxication: the common man in his element, the pub. This is not inspiration but gross intoxication, the unimaginative revelry in being a noisome little “I” that must die. In the order of magnitudes, the blind hand that will nullify the man’s limited consciousness is simply another “thoughtless hand” writ larger. All there is, in this man’s vision, is the nugatory buzz of bare life, from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic levels, like an endless violent series of nested dolls. The man, here, actually becomes a fly: “Till some blind hand / Shall brush *my* wing” (emphasis added). But then he tries to define life and death:

If thought is life
And strength & breath;
And the want
Of thought is death...

Finally, we get to the operative logic. The core problem of the poem hinges on this “If”: “If thought is life / And strength & breath...” This hypothetical “if” invites us to assume that thought is life or spirit, but gives us room to doubt. Do we need to agree? What if we don’t?

The speaker’s point in this “if, then” construction seems to be that if thought is life, then he was never alive in the first place. Thinking is too much trouble, especially as it might involve feeling, or becoming more intimate with a scene of relationship, which (to the modern agent) is best reduced to its lowest common denominators. He is clearly having trouble thinking when he asks, “Or art not thou / A man like me?” In one sense, this is actually a valid moment of perception.

(Hold on: you're not just an it or a thing. You're a self-interested little sentience innocently minding its business. My god, that's exactly what I am!). But this is philosophy with a very rudimentary brain stem. Or, worse, this is philosophy that wants not to feel.

Things get slippery, fast. From this premise that thought is life and the want of thought is death, he arrives at the strange conclusion that he's a happy fly if he lives or if he dies. The repeated "if" draws into question whether he exists at all:

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

On the surface, he seems to be saying, whether I live or die, I'm a happy fly. I'm happy because thought is life, but, as I am fly, I don't think. I'm a programmed mechanism, and so what I mean by happy is that I'm minding my own business, dancing, drinking, and singing, oblivious to the fact that my existence might have other ramifications. I'm bare, brute life. My activity may be destroying the activity of other mindless discrete atoms of activity, and likewise I will be destroyed, but I don't belong to either life or death. I'm bare activity that never ceases. I'm an "it." I feel nothing because the world I perceive is relentless "life-in-death" (Coleridge).¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ In Blake's sense, this detached modern agent becomes what he beholds, a proposition graphically depicted in the contraction and "bonification" of Los (fallen imagination's) capacity to feel into a spine or determinate nervous system. Los, who (like the modern agents) sees the world as an "Abyss," is figured here as severing himself from feeling or sympathy, separating "male" and "female" into polarized and ossified objects. He develops a nervous system and a psychology that reflects his desensitized, bifurcated perception of the world, or the severance of perception from etho-ecological attention. His heart becomes a "red Round Globe" that sinks "into the Deep," which he trembles and weeps over until it becomes "a Female pale" and he hardens into "a Male Form howling in Jealousy":

Terrified Los stood in the Abyss & his immortal limbs
Grew deadly pale; he became what he beheld: for a red
Round Globe sunk down from his Bosom into the Deep in pangs
He hoverd over it trembling & weeping. suspended it shook
The nether Abyss in tremblings. he wept over it, he cherish'd it
In deadly sickening pain: till separated into a Female pale

Alternatively, one could read this proposition (Then am I / A happy fly, If I live, / Or if I die) to mean that if we're at best thinking machines – and we're going to be blotted out soon enough – we may as well be noisy little beings in an existence that is nasty, brutish, and short. The thrice-repeated “I” calls attention to itself, as if to alert us to the pressing Cartesian question of whether the “I” is thought. The previous stanza suggests that the “I” is actually thoughtless, a kind of pre-programmed, instinctual existence. The jarring word in the final stanza is “happy.” It is only with irony that the speaker can describe the fly as happy, and the irony is itself a nihilistic strategy, an undercutting of meaning. The equivocal “if” in “If I live / Or if I die” reinforces this inconsequentiality. Life and death are the same to the fly, because bare life cannot be demarcated from death. Its hedonistic happiness is annihilatory, the intoxication that obliterates (yet reinforces) the painful sense of a mortal, alienated, discrete existence.^{xlvii}

vi. “when I died”

Dickinson’s *I heard a Fly buzz - when I died* likewise dramatizes the absurdity of an “I” that would hold itself apart, as an independent existence. If reading, as a solitary hermeneutics might reinforce this centered optics, the poem subverts such mastery, launching directly into a temporal dislocation that is also an affective dislocation. “I heard a Fly buzz —” is a normal enough opening clause, but “— when I died” as its corollary is bizarre. An affective dissonance¹⁸⁵ lurks in the

As the cloud that brings the snow: all the while from his Back
A blue fluid exuded in Sinews hardening in the Abyss
Till it separated into a Male Form howling in Jealousy...

Milton, Plate 3, (E 97)

¹⁸⁵ Perhaps not unrelated to the synthesis of shock and boredom that Sianne Ngai calls “stuplimity.”

buzzing of the fly. Paired with the next half of the line, via the dislocating quantum Dickinsonian dash, it delivers a jolt.

As often happens when one reads Dickinson, one steps unsuspectingly across a threshold. Momentarily, the text exposes the alien, affective dissonance of death. After all, the speaker is talking, from “the other side.” She seems to have come through it intact. She died, but she’s still able to tell us what she experienced at death. We have stepped into an ontological weird zone, the uncanny. (*Is a dead person speaking to us or is death speaking to us? Is our own death speaking to us? Is she the undead, who only seems to have come through death intact?*).

Does the buzz definitively establish the presence of a fly? Likewise, why impute an I? What if there is only the buzz? Arguably, language cannot speak about that buzz. In that sense, the opening line of the poem is not New England asperity, but counter-epistemological humor. It points to the absurdity of saying “I” in the first place, framing a repeated sign of expired identity around a nonhuman buzzing: “I heard a Fly buzz — when I died—”.

Oddly the real subject of the sentence appears to be the buzz, the lowest common denominator or plane of equivalence to which the alleged subjects (the I and the Fly) are reduced. Then comes the next line:

The Stillness in the Room

We are set up to experience this “Stillness in the Room...” What is this stillness, into which we are ushered by the psychopompic Fly? What, but the subsiding of presentational consciousness, moving, without preliminaries, through quantum dislocations toward counter-cognition. Her poetics is not that eccentric after all. Rather, it is deterritorializing or “counter-actualizing” (Deleuze and Guattari) in ways that unbar etho-ecological attention.

Such counter-actualization is not without its wink, and challenge, to the centered reader. It is worth running through the poem, again. From the opening line, one is subtly unsettled by the slippage between the apparently genteel voice of the speaker and the buzz of the inanimate. How can a genteel “I” speak of its death, as if it has not, in a sense, become death? The phrase “the Heaves of Storm,” the first in a series of synecdoches, contrasts with the ominous stillness in the air that precedes some massive event:

The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air —
Between the Heaves of Storm —

From this quasi-personification of the storm, we move to a quasi-objectification of the human:

The Eyes around — had wrung them dry —
And Breaths were gathering firm

Instead of referring to the people present at the deathbed, the speaker refers to Eyes and Breaths, disembodied organs and functions. These depersonalized and dislocated not-quite-human agents are gathering firm for the last onset, the death of the speaker, the I:

The Eyes around — had wrung them dry —
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset — when the King
Be witnessed — in the Room —

It is wonderfully ambiguous whether the King they expect to enter the Room is death or god. Either way, Dickinson capitalizes the word Room as if to emphasize that the room is a metaphor for the world, the container or shared space of corporeal existence, to which death is a mystery, a invisible visitation that can only be known in the negative. If there’s an air of reverence, of expected sublimity, if not some kind of actual feeling of the presence of the ultimate, the ground is going to drop out from under us. We’re actually approaching the moment of dislocation, the extra-positional or superpositional buzzing, that initiated the poem:

I willed my Keepsakes — Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable — and then it was
There interposed a Fly —

Here the speaker tells us that she parts from her “Keepsakes” — that is, her attachments, her intimate associations, her most personal memories. She signs them away, a wonderful phrase, because in a sense these keepsakes were never anything but signs. In doing so, she releases her claim to “What portion of me be / Assignable...” Should we be worried by that enjambment?

This assignable portion seems awfully extraneous or adventitious, as if it never mattered at all. In that case, the voice speaking to us is the non-assignable: not necessarily a portion but what remains after the subtraction of the assignable. Ostensibly, she is talking about her worldly possessions, which she can still leave behind, but the language suggests she is talking about every material trace, everything that can be designated. She signs away her linguistic self. And yet, there is a remainder, beyond all concept of portion. Is it an accident that it is exactly when she wills her Keepsakes that the fly interposes?

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -
Between the light - and me -

The poem never quite enables one to see the fly. One receives, instead, the impression of a fly, its attributes of color, movement, and sound flowing together, so that the buzz is not only stumbling and uncertain but blue. The “b” sound in blue helps create an alliterative onomatopoeic burr (blue, buzz, between) - a series of plosives or voiced bilabial stops. The effect is synesthetic, erratic, disorienting, setting up an abrupt, enigmatic, anti-climax. Some sort of affective dissonance is disrupting the narrative pleasure or spacio-temporal mastery of centered, self-oriented discursive identity. Is this a frightening enactment of the event of death? Or, is it a non-event in a place of non-images, a place without knowledge?

And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see -

The light of reason and of specular optics is blotted out by an erratic, nattering dissonance. Strangely, “the Windows” fail. It’s unclear whether the windows are the windows of the eyes (the outlets of attention), or the windows of the room (the inlets of impressions). The repetition of “And then” may signal entry into the deterritorialized planar horizon of Deleuze’s difference and repetition, not the dialectical Hegelian world of identity and negation.^{xlviii} The notion of pure identity or absolute consciousness, of “light,” seems to be undercut.

And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see -

The diction is strange. Light may fail, but how do windows fail? Why does she say, enigmatically, “I could not see to see”? The conjunction “And” also seems to mark a disjunction; a leap into uncountable experience. The speaker signs away the portion of herself that is assignable, and, then there’s an erratic buzzing, an affective dissonance, an extinguishing of the light and of the senses. Grammatically, it would seem the the speaker can’t see because she can’t see. That is, she’s still a perceiving sentience but with no sight, no ability to convert experience into visual images, or into human knowledge. Epistemic identity is unmoored. Apparently, the reader has finally approached the enigma of the speaker’s condition: unconditioned but etho-ecological. Unbarred.

This provides a means of reassessing the tone of gentle mockery in the earlier lines,

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room -

The merely dramatic and suspenseful stillness in the room may seem requisite for the dissolution of the experiencer:

The Stillness in the Room

Was like the Stillness in the Air —
Between the Heaves of Storm —

But it seems the “Stillness” here also marks the suspenseful state of deathbed spectators, who have been enacting ritual displays of emotion. The speaker remains curiously distant from the people, presumably intimate relations. She is passing away from their material concerns.

The “Stillness in the Air” may be the most beautiful element in the poem, but it is merely a hiatus between “Heaves of Storm” (melodramatic and hyperbolic figures for emotion), and there is no indication that the speaker merges with this stillness or immanence. Instead, the next leap of dislocation abruptly renders the weeping and sighing of the society of spectators at the deathbed scene ludicrous:

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room —

We see only organs without bodies, eyes ringing themselves dry, breaths gathering firm for the grand event, the “onset,” which denotes both a beginning and an attack. The comedy continues with the farce of signing one’s will, apparently seconds before one’s death:

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable - and then it was
There interposed a Fly -

Exactly what portions of “me” are assignable, and how on earth might one sign or will them away? As other interpreters have noted, the nattering Fly that interposes itself at this point actually seems to substitute itself for the sublime King. Is it possible that the speaking “I” is misinterpreting the buzz, or imputing a fly, in order to forestall awareness of intensity? Is there necessarily a fly present at all? Could the grasping “I” be experiencing the nonhuman threshold as blue, uncertain,

and stumbling in part because of an old habit of reacting to whatever lies outside thought as a threatening alterity?

At the very least, the poem refuses knowledge, and all of its representations: the light, the me, the visual. The world we know looks strangely and ludicrously familiar, with eyes and breaths enlisted in a ridiculous performance, and maybe, as in Blake, the joke is on us for thinking we existed apart from infinity in the first place, or for thinking that we, as the human center of common sense, would grasp it as a totality. Instead of being spoken to by the “I” in its culminating moment of light and absolute identity, we meet this gently uncanny speaker, who has lessened toward uncounted experience, the eventless, etho-ecological horizon.¹⁸⁶

Dickinson’s fascicles are filled with comparatively direct poems (such as *This World is not conclusion*)¹⁸⁷ in which what matters is the description of the nonordinary experience of attention

¹⁸⁶ Elsewhere, she describes this as the moment “When everything that ticked - has stopped - / And space stares - all around -”

¹⁸⁷ I would note that the final lines of *This World is not conclusion* (“*Narcotics cannot still the Tooth / That nibbles at the soul—*”) are often misread as the expression of a starkly realist atheism. On the contrary, the poem emphasizes the inadequacy of all forms of faith, belief, and theory (all forms of conclusion and knowledge), and the need instead for experiential attention, or what I have been calling etho-ecological attention without epistemic bars:

This World is not conclusion.
A Species stands beyond—
Invisible, as Music—
But positive, as Sound—
It beckons, and it baffles—
Philosophy, don't know—
And through a Riddle, at the last—
Sagacity, must go—
To guess it, puzzles scholars—
To gain it, Men have borne
Contempt of Generations
And Crucifixion, shown—
Faith slips—and laughs, and rallies—
Blushes, if any see—
Plucks at a twig of Evidence—
And asks a Vane, the way—
Much Gesture, from the Pulpit—

without an “I,” rather than the position of the “I.” In that sense, *I heard a Fly buzz - when I died* seems to fall into the category of Dickinson poems that (like *I tie my Hat — I crease my Shawl—*) dramatize the humorous disjunction between extensive, conventional communication, which requires an “I,” and poetry, which has no “I” and cannot be understood from the “I” perspective. Like Blake, she asks us to venture from optics into haptics.

As I will continue to explore, through an investigation of second generation romantic dream-visions (and of the neuroaesthetics of dreaming) what is at stake is not simply the future potential, but the moment-to-moment need, for experiential interrelation. In that sense, as Blake and Dickinson bring home, the need to undo modernity’s interdiction of speculative metaphysics is not simply an intellectual need – to “free our notions from participation in an epistemological theory of sense-perception” (Shaviro 11) – but an emotional or etho-ecological need. It is matter of life and death for the feeling subject, but also for the culture. Blake’s *Auguries of Innocence* insists that what happens in the case of the most individual event of attention has universal effects or collective implications: “A robin redbreast in a cage / Puts all heaven in a rage.” This ethical imperative to undo the modern bar on etho-ecological feeling, because the individual *is* the transpersonal, is echoed by Dickinson:

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

Strong Hallelujahs roll—
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth
That nibbles at the soul –
F373 (1862) 501

In highlighting the connection between poetry and counter-cultural attention,¹⁸⁸ I would agree with, but extend the speculative feminist view, expressed in *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, that the drive of this “countercultural kind of perceiving” (Bennett xiv) is to “induce in human bodies an aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality” (x) or to foster “a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside of the human body” (xiv).^{xlix} For “material vitality” and for “nonhuman forces,” we might do better, thinking with Whitehead and Stengers, to substitute the notion of etho-ecological transmissions of feeling, or sympathy.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Attention, after all, involves not only perception, but touch, as suggested in Eve Sedgwick’s phrase, “touching feeling.” It insistently refuses the conventional organization of sense-experience in conventional aesthetics. It also relentlessly undermines our bias about exceptional human intelligence and sensitivity. It opens, in nonmodern ways, into the postsecular. It unbars the etho-ecological.

¹⁸⁹ Here, Haraway’s call (with Stengers) to rethink autopoiesis as sympoiesis strikes me as an extremely valuable, postsecular revision of the kind of vitalist materialism proposed by Bennett and Braidotti.

Chapter 5 Keats's Conch: Second Generation Romantic Dream-Visions

“This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.” (John Keats, Letter to George and Tom Keats, 22 December 1818)

1 Fanatics have their dreams

If first generation romanticism's visionary project was one of redemptive imagination, aspiring to reverse the “fall” into modern self-consciousness, Shelley and Keats are widely understood to have revised, if not rejected, this scheme of salvation. For Thomas Pfau,¹⁹⁰ the melancholic last stage of romanticism suffered under the weight of a “thoroughly overdetermined world in which all objects, identities, and possible forms of action appear owned and exhausted a priori” (Pfau 326). As he argues in *Romantic Moods*, the second-generation romantics labored in a claustrophobic “post-Waterloo” era. Referring to Keats's poetry as “studiously patterned... verbal finery,” he suggests (with parallels to Morton's argument in *The Poetics of Spice*) that Keats's celebrated sensuality sharply satirizes the commodity status of poetry itself.

One might argue, along these historical materialist lines, that Keatsian aesthetics expresses disillusionment with both aesthetics and subjectivity. To do so risks overlooking the radical aesthetics, and etho-ecological model of subjectivity, at work in his poetry. If Keats famously

¹⁹⁰ Pfau's *Romantic Moods* offers a sweeping analysis of how the moods or affects of romantic poetry registered and gave access – through the “cocoon of aesthetic form” – to a historical immediacy that would otherwise threaten socially constituted subjectivity.

endorses an aesthetics of "no self" (in contrast to the Wordsworthian "egotistical sublime"), he explicitly notes that the poet of no-self "lives in gusto" or in passage:

As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself - it has no self - it is every thing and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body - The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute - the poet has none; no identity - he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.

Keats, "Letter to Richard Woodhouse," October 27th, 1818

I would suggest that Keats's "negative" poetics is best understood as a poetics of intensivity, which ventures *past* Wordsworthian melancholy. The figure of the fallen Saturn, that "frozen god" (*Fall of Hyperion* 386) and "old man of the earth / Bewailing earthly loss" (440-441), possibly points to Wordsworth. In *The Fall of Hyperion*, Moneta¹ grants the poet-dreamer the vision to witness the goddess Thea, deep in a shady vale, rousing the "fallen divinity" (316). Saturn's enfeebled and "melancholy" (370) utterances give the lie to his still godlike appearance:

So he feebly ceased,
With such a poor and sickly-sounding pause,
Methought I heard some old man of the earth
Bewailing earthly loss; nor could my eyes
And ears act with that unison of sense
Which marries sweet sound with the grace of form,
And dolorous accent from a tragic harp
With large-limb'd visions. (438-445)

The dream-poet's sympathies seem to lie with the new gods, Cybele's children, which the fading Saturn – that "image huge" (298) and "vast" and "pale giant" (457-458) – describes as "pernicious babes" who "[h]ave changed a god into a shaking palsy" (425-426). Keats seems to tacitly link the second-generation romantics to the "remorseless speed" (366) that has rendered

Wordsworth/Saturn obsolete. This speed might be interpreted as etho-ecological intensivity, which exceeds melancholic egocentrism.¹⁹¹

In making this argument, that Keats and Shelley's dream-vision poems press the lyric mode past the optic (lyre) to the haptic (conch), I would not wish to suggest that they simply reacted against Wordsworth. On the contrary, the weight of the evidence points to an effort to intensify a shift incipient in Wordsworth. This is not to say that one does not find (biting and well-deserved) caricatures of Wordsworth in Shelley and Keats, which target a form of lyricism that the younger poets cast themselves as superseding. The thorny point here is that, as Keats and Shelley illustrate, and as Wordsworth at his highest pitch implies, it would be a mistake to respond to modernity with melancholic nostalgia, or to awaken to it traumatically. As Tilottama Rajan suggests in *Romantic Narrative*, the trauma of modernity is its *foreclosure* of sympoieis. In that sense, to awaken to modernity is less to be rudely disillusioned about outmoded cultural fantasies than to perceive the modern bar on etho-ecological attention, the proper response to which is not melancholy but more "beauty," speed, intensivity, bliss. Modernity, in this sense, despite its apparent acceleration, is not radical but conservative, not promiscuous but normative, not deterritorializing but territorializing, not etho-ecological but bioinformatic.

While recent readings of Wordsworth in terms of a traumatic awakening to the cataclysm of modernity (Pfau, Goodman, Favret, Jackson) are refreshing, and pick up on Wordsworth's socially concerned (Simpson) subversions of conservative "reflection,"¹⁹² often the metaphysical basis of Wordsworth's ethics seems to elude critical interest. In the same vein, Keats's poetry does not seem adequately explained in terms of an implicit critique of the links between refined

¹⁹¹ One might reply to Pfau's description of Keat's poetry as "verbal finery" with the counter-claim that his poetry is less about vitiated simulacra than about the virtual.

¹⁹² For Pfau, Wordsworth's "tranquil" pastoral registers historical disturbance or what Goodman calls "affective dissonance."

sensibility, the aesthetic, and commodification, though such a satire is intensely evident in poems such as *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *Lamia*. Beyond this resistance to reification, Keats presses toward an etho-ecological intensivity (often through the figure of impassioned, self-forgotten love) beyond the scope of both poems and persons. He points, more than Wordsworth, to an intensive ecology. His figure (as I have noted) for this alternative prehensive mode of cognition is the conch (with its unfabricated, non-localizable oceanic melody) in contrast to the more instrumental lyre. Keats's conch, I shall argue, can be read as a figure of embodied cognition and of aesthetic subjectivity, the "working" yet non-instrumentalist brain, that undercuts the "I" and "Thou" that would be wed in "spousal verse."^{li}

In looking at the figure of the conch in the *Hyperion* poems, I place it in the overarching context of second generation romantic dream-visions or visionary ecologies. Conveniently, *The Fall of Hyperion: a Vision*, begins with a discussion of the relationship of poetry to dreaming, a theme which proves to be the golden thread that runs through the dream-poet's conversation with Moneta.^{liii} Dreaming, the poem's opening lines suggest, is the intensivity that underlies both life and death, and yet not all contemporary poetry, not even his own, can be proven to be truly intensive or occurrent rather than fanatical.¹⁹³ Deferring judgment until the "warm scribe" of his hand "is in the grave," Keats foregrounds the fact that the writer has a sensuous body and is caught

¹⁹³ One of countless instances of romantic poetry's haptic insistence, the opening eighteen lines of John Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* are not only "pure magic" but also an explicit meditation on imagination as aesthetic ontology. The poem's first line, admittedly, may cast all such onto poetic magic into question, hinting that word-woven fantasies prove snares: "Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave / A paradise for a sect." Yet, Keats is not, on that account, suspicious of aesthetic imagination. Like Wordsworth, after the 1790s, Keats is careful to remind the reader of the difference between the fine spell of words spun by fanatics and that spun by poets, though both are concerned with a new world. Fanatics tend to have quite deliberate and selective dreams about that new world. Their dreams conform to the carefully selected version of reality they would like to impose. But, for Keats, dreaming crucially *precedes* the compositional act of weaving. A poet (unlike a fanatic) allows the prehensive activity of dreaming itself to modify his or her preconceptions.

up with sensuous things; a hint of tension between "clod" and "grave" suggests that poetry is a dangerous affair. Yet one point of distinction between poets and fanatics, he implies, is precisely that the latter do not tend to look at their acts of writing as a kind of dreaming. The clod (the bounded, territorializing knower) insists on the actual, while the poet risks deterritorializing attention.

Like the fallen figure of Rousseau in Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, and the fallen figure of Saturn in *The Fall of Hyperion*, fanatics suffer what they write, producing "seeds of misery" (exerting a discursive power over the body that "infects" others, such that "words" have the performative power of "deeds") instead of (as poets do) "inly" quelling their "passions" through "living melody":

See the great bards of old who inly quelled
'The passions which they sung, as by their strain
May well be known: their living melody
Tempers its own contagion to the vein
'Of those who are infected with it – I
Have suffered what I wrote, or viler pain!
'And so my words were seeds of misery –
Even as the deeds of others.'
(*Triumph of Life* 274-281)

This Shelleyan notion of "living melody" resonates strongly with the Keatsian association of poesis with "melodious utterance" or the "fine spell of words," suggesting a more radical break with centered, private reflection than that suggested in Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and "emotion recollected in tranquility." Again, though, second generation romantic poetry does not simply reject the first-generation renovation of experience. Keats and Shelley intensify its trajectory.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ One might read Keats and Shelley via Blake, and his "infernal method" of printing "by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*).

As I have been suggesting, figures of poetry in second generation romanticism intensify the first-generation challenge to modern optics. The “conch” prefigured in Wordsworth becomes, in Keats, an explicit successor to the “lyre.” Where the lyre is a man-made instrument, played through practice and contrivance, the conch is an organic thing, structurally analogous to the ear. To set the conch to one’s ear is to hear a music that may, ambiguously, be either in the body or in the world. Its essence is listening, a kind of haptic attention that undoes isolated location.¹⁹⁵ In Keats, this deterritorialization takes the specific form of an equivocation between the conch and ear, extensive organic form and intensive spiral of counter-cognition. The Keatsian slippage between conch and/or ear (“soft-conched ear” or “mouthed conch”) suggests a counter-figuration of the lyric instrument, the lyre. Composed of inward turnings or involutions, neither hard nor soft (“soft-conched” or “mouthed”), the conch is more a figure for poiesis than lyric¹⁹⁶ — less an instrument than an analogue of the ear in its proximity to the brain, or the zone of listening attention as occurrent event.^{liii}

In this context, the conch seems a subtler figure for poetry than the lyre. There are no strings to be expertly attuned and no fixed melody but “tuneless numbers” – a kind of pure mathematics of meter that requires a discipline that frees one from self-involvement (“sweet enforcement”) and

¹⁹⁵ In *Romantic Narrative*, Tilottama Rajan discusses this *virtualization* of the lyric poet in Shelley's *Alastor*. In Rajan's reading, second generation romantics are hyperaware of the problem that "lyric" as a genre tends to “foreclose” poetry’s “disseminative” potential. *Alastor*, she argues, dissolves or “depotentializes” the figure of the lyric poet in a potential plane of immanence, from which it can be revived in new forms: “It is from this liminal space that the Narrator summons the Poet’s ‘phantasm’ at the beginning of *Alastor*, and it is to this space that he returns his ‘image’ at the end, allowing Shelley to depotentialize the figure of the Poet and make it available for further reflection” (Rajan 5). A similar virtualization or dissolution of the figure of the lyric poet, and of the lyre, that nevertheless restores the lyric poet to a more radical potential, happens in Keats – in his letters, his odes, and in *The Fall of Hyperion* – primarily through an equivalence between conch and ear. Rajan makes explicit what seems only implicit in de Man’s classic reading: that an anti-lyric or anti-generic awareness within lyric makes the poet a figure of “counter-actualization.”

¹⁹⁶ I use these two terms in the sense suggested by Rajan in *Romantic Narrative*.

a kind of memory that costs the cogito its closure (“remembrance dear”). A figure of “listening,” the conch is an opening for beauty that begins outside rather than inside the subject:¹⁹⁷ “In desire, as in cognition, experience begins with the subject; in aesthetic feeling, experience begins outside, and culminates, or eventuates, in the subject” (WC 6).

In Keats’s *Ode to Psyche*, too, the figure of the conch expresses second generation romanticism’s intensification of the drive toward etho-ecological relationship. And, like the opening of *The Fall of Hyperion*, the poem’s initial apology distances itself from Wordsworth’s “palpable design”:

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-conched ear...

If in Wordsworth to set ear to the shell is to gradually apprehend a prophetic ode that prophecies the end of the human, then in Keats the conch is poetry *as* self-altering cognition. *Ode to Psyche*’s unfolding equation of trees with rhizomatic thoughts (“Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain, / Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind”) and of dreaming with seeing (“Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see”), along with its equation of “untrodden region of the mind” with a

¹⁹⁷ Steven Shaviro comments on how, in Whitehead, the aesthetic of the beautiful is less cognitive than affective, and less representational than ontological. To attend is to be affected:

“Outside of cognition or utilitarian interest, this is how the beautiful object allures me. In Whitehead’s terms, ‘the basis of experience is emotional... the basic fact is the rise of an affective tone originating from things whose relevance is given.’ This affective tone is the ‘subjective form’ through which ‘the experience constitutes itself’” (WC 4). Shaviro notes that “for Whitehead, just as much as for Kant, there is nothing outside of experience, and no experience without a subject,” with the crucial difference that in Whitehead attention, affect, and experience are primary (rather than cognition). One does not need consciousness for there to be experience or subjectivity. Following Shaviro’s view that Whitehead does not so much reject Kant as draw out the radical aesthetic implications of the *Third Critique*, one might say that Keats does to Wordsworth what Whitehead does to Kant: “Kant assumes, in the First Critique, that experience is fundamentally conscious and cognitive. Whitehead says, to the contrary, that ‘in general, consciousness is negligible’... experience is ‘implicit, below consciousness, in our physical feelings’...” (WC 8).

space of “wide quietness” suggests how, in cognitive processes, the “virtual” (poiesis) remains immanent to the “actual” (figuration):¹⁹⁸

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...

Yet the continuities prove more interesting than the discontinuities between Keats's and Wordsworth's dream-visions of the shell, as a figure for sympoiesis. Lee Johnson clarifies, in *Wordsworth's Metaphysical Verse*, that the association of the shell with the deluge in Wordsworth's dream-vision of the Arab, stone, and shell in Book V of *The Prelude* is more nuanced than it may seem, in keeping with the passage's metrical organization:

The transformations and reductions of images in the dream are part of the mature poet's sense of spiritual pattern and derive from his literary and mathematical studies rather than from the natural geometry of the environment... It would not be going too far to assert that the dream chiefly expresses a conflict between the mind's ability to dwell in the permanent realm of pure geometry, poetry, and spiritual truth and its inability to create temporal forms of that realm which are equally permanent. In trying to resolve the conflict, Wordsworth gives us the most poetry can offer: a dream-vision of such power that it may appeal to our instincts and which is designed in such a rigorously geometric manner that it may elicit the admiration of the intellect. *The dream, as we shall learn, unfolds a triple golden section, a continuous proportion in three interlocking movements.* By this geometrical means of imaging the spiritual in the material, the “body” of literature, which exists in the physically perishable form of books, is returned to the spirit of literature, just as, in religious poetry, the word is absorbed into the Word. (Johnson 85; emphasis added)

Johnson is quick to point out that the passage is marked, metrically and thematically, by successive movements that correspond to ratios of time and eternity:

The structure of the dream is that of a triple golden section repeated three times. The texts of 1805 and 1850, although differing slightly in length, both show acceptable calculations of the proportion. The geometric design calls attention to the dream's eternal character — that

¹⁹⁸ Shaviro comments: “If Being is univocal, and everything is an event, and the human and the rational hold no special privileges, then epistemology must be demoted from the central role that it generally holds in post-Cartesian (and especially post-Kantian) thought. The whole point of Whitehead's philosophy is ‘to free our notions from participation in an epistemological theory of sense-perception...’” (“Deleuze's Encounter with Whitehead” 11)

it is something sent. Its divisions are marked by breaks in the fictional time of the narration and in each instance by the repetition of key images — the stone, the shell, and the Arab. The divisions exhaust the various ways in which time and eternity can relate to one another. There is a progression from a landscape of time to one of eternity in relation to time; then eternity itself is celebrated; finally, time in relation to eternity is placed against all that precedes it, and the dream is rounded off by a return to the original landscape of time, the magnitude of which provides the final fulfillment of the mathematical patterns governing the entirety of the vision. (87)

Hence, it is possible for the conch (doubly perceived as the “book” of poetry) to mean different things in different moments of the movement from time to eternity and back:

The book of poetry is spoken of purely as something to be celebrated, a fact which does not seem consonant with its earlier function as a bearer of apocalyptic tidings. In the present context, however, it is solely an object of eternity. Earlier, it existed in relation to time, and the message which all eternal objects bring to time is simply that time must perish. In time, the dreamer may experience “distress and fear.” By contrast, in these lines on eternity, he is content with “a perfect faith in all that passed.” The only reminder of the imminent deluge is the Arab, who intends “to bury those two books,” presumably in a vain attempt to save them from the catastrophe. (90)

Johnson offers a close reading of the subtle and almost imperceptible transformations through which the sound of the shell transitions, when the dreamer sets it to his ear:

...the Arab told me that the stone
(To give it in the language of the dream)
Was ‘Euclid’s Elements’; and ‘This,’ said he,
‘Is something of more worth’; and at the word
Stretched forth the shell, so beautiful in shape,
In colour so resplendent, with command
That I should hold it to my ear. I did so,
And heard that instant in an unknown tongue,
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
A loud prophetic blast of harmony;
An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold
Destruction to the children of the earth
By deluge, now at hand. (1850, v, 86-98)

One might argue that the conversion of a haptic, virtual, vibratory transmission, initially experienced as an “unknown tongue,” into “articulate sound” marks an inability to tarry with the nonhuman, or listen prehensively to the etho-ecological voice of the more-than-human. From the

radical empiricist point of view, exemplified in Bergson and Whitehead, something is clearly subtracted or explained away in the automatic conversion of prehension into cognition, virtual and actual, deterritorialization into territorialization. For this reason, I may be less optimistic than Johnson about the value Wordsworth attributes to the increasing determinism by which the unknown tongue becomes a “loud prophetic blast” and then an ominous “Ode.” Nevertheless, his reading shows an unusual (one might say, medievalist)¹⁹⁹ sensitivity to what Susan Wolfson has called the “formal charges” of romantic poetry:

The shell is logically associated with a deluge, but Wordsworth’s finest touch in writing this passage is the transformation of “an unknown tongue” into “articulate sounds” and then into a “blast of harmony” and an “Ode, in passion uttered.” Each successive stage represents the dreamer’s increasing apprehension of the sounds, the meaning of which depends solely on their attainment of form. The most specific designation of form is, of course, the last — “an Ode, in passion uttered” — and such a poem was considered in Wordsworth’s time to be an ideal vehicle for sublime expressions of transcendental themes. By showing the dreamer’s successive responses to the sounds from the shell, these transformations are similar to the challenge of understanding Wordsworth’s poetry properly: ultimate meaning may reside not so much in individual words and phrases as in the patterns and structures in which the words are arranged. (Johnson 88-9)

Johnson’s reading helps to establish that Keats’s use of the conch (as a figure for both poetry and for an etho-ecological mode of self-altering cognition) is prefigured in Wordsworth’s use of the shell, and that, in crucial ways, Wordsworth’s “dream-vision” passage anticipates Keats’s and Shelley’s dream-vision poems. This intuition is solidified, I would suggest, by Levinson’s Spinozist re-reading of Wordsworth. The case can be made, in other words, that the second generation romantics (far more aware of Wordsworth than they were Blake) responded to, and extended, first generation romanticism’s aesthetic ontology.

Dreaming does not seem as inherently faulty for Keats as critics have claimed. Rather, he presents dreaming as a mode of intensivity. True, Moneta, in *The Fall of Hyperion* accuses the

¹⁹⁹ Drawing on an intimate knowledge of Dante and Spenser, and their influence on the romantics.

poet-dreamer of being a “dreaming thing / A fever of thyself,” but the poem on the whole provokes acute awareness of the dream-like, onto poetic nature of experience.²⁰⁰ Keats neither speculates about the nature of dreaming, nor does he reduce it to a cognitive or psychological phenomenon, but treats it as an ontological given. As he presents it, dreaming is not at the periphery of life, but is precisely what occurs between life and death: we “live, dream, and die.”²⁰¹

The Fall of Hyperion hinges, in fact, on a (often misinterpreted) distinction between dreamers and poets. While many readers take Keats to privilege poets over dreamers, in my view he clearly prefers the former, chastising the latter on the grounds that many who versify (“mock lyrists, large self worshipers, / 'And careless Hectorers in proud bad verse'”) in fact betray experience, pouring out a “balm” on the world rather than “vexing” it.^{liv}

If, as the poet-dreamer of *The Fall of Hyperion* conjectures, “a poet is a sage; 'A humanist, physician to all men,” then this physician or dreamer-poet offers something of a bitter medicine that addresses the deeper cause rather than the symptom. The dreamer-poet, in this sense, works to heal the fragmentation of consciousness, a disease not of the individual but of the world. This disease arises from the political economy that constricts political ecology, and from the materialism that forecloses metaphysics. If for Keats, poetry constitutes an unfabricated “fane” to Psyche “in some untrodden region” of the mind (*Ode to Psyche* 50-1), then this fane is the weaving of etho-ecological intensivity (the active metaphysics) that exceeds and grounds cognition. This is

²⁰⁰ In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead writes: “In Cartesian language, the essence of an actual entity consists solely in the fact that it is a prehending thing...” (41).

²⁰¹ Keats, who kept a bust of the Bard beside him while he wrote, would have known Prospero’s lines: “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep.” *The Tempest* 4.1.153-158

not the Urizenic,²⁰² totalitarian order that lasts a thousand years, but an ever-imminent paradise that never quite exists.²⁰³

2 Intensive Time: “drops of experience, complex and interdependent”

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre . . .
Yet even in these days so far retired
From happy pieties . . .
I see and sing by my own eyes inspired.
(Ode to Psyche 36-43)

I would like to tarry with *Ode to Psyche*, and with the conch/ear conceit, in order to clarify the romantic associations between poetry and virtual ecology. In Keats, if it is “too late” for the “fond believing lyre,” it is not too late for intensive attention. Here, the “fane” is no external altar to external gods, but an etho-ecological intensivity or virtual ecology active *in* (though not necessarily of) the brain. Hence, the poem begins with the image of singing into Psyche’s own “soft-conched ear”:

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-conched ear... (1-4)

²⁰² Blake’s image of “the eternal mind bounded” in *The Book of Urizen* most clearly expresses the romantic challenge to empiricist optics as that which bars and interdicts the feeling of the more-than-individual and more-than-human.

²⁰³ Imagination, for Keats and his fellow romantics, is intimately tied to etho-ecological intensivity, in excess of modern “bounded” experience. Dreaming, from this perspective, is “medicine” less in the secular sense than in a more holistic sense: it “cures” the modern individual of a sense of limited relation, or isolation.

Invoking the goddess, Keats characterizes his lines of verse as “tuneless numbers” because they are written, mainly, in a consistent meter (iambic pentameter) but are literally “tuneless” in that words on a page are as mute as musical notation. The “sweet enforcement” and the verb “wrung” sensuously imply the poet’s pleasantly painful intensive effort in composing the metrical lines. The “remembrance dear,” however, implies that the content of the poem is memory, a notion reinforced by the word “secrets” in the following line. Ostensibly, the poet is remembering Psyche’s secrets, and singing them into her own ear – a strange image that suggests that the composition of the lines of verse is an act of singing, but the listener (rather than the reader, or even the page) is Psyche (in the sense of unforeclosed intensivity) itself.

The image of the “soft-conched ear” has particular resonance, as Clymene in *The Fall of Hyperion* blows into a “mouthed shell” only to hear her weak melody echoed back to her with the “living death” of a “gush of sounds.” When she throws this conch-like shell onto the sand, the poet-dreamer reports that “...a wave fill’d it, as my sense was fill’d / With that new blissful golden melody.” Likewise, in *The Fall of Hyperion*, Thea whispers into Saturn’s ears, waking him to the knowledge of his lost empires, her voice compared to the wind that blows through an enchanted summer forest. These motifs of speaking or breathing into an ear or conch hint not so much at remembering as becoming attentive again. To listen to the shell, forever filled by the invisible flow of things, is to prehend “new blissful golden melody.”^{lv}

In the opening of *The Fall of Hyperion*, when the narrator asks Moneta, the High Prophetess, to “purge off” his “mind’s film,” she informs him that he is a “dreamer” not a poet, “a dreaming thing, / A fever of thyself” (168-9). While a (conventional, professional) poet is in conscious control, a ‘havenless’ dreamer “venoms all his days” unable to keep “the pain alone, the joy alone, distinct” (174-5). A dreamer is uncontrollably subject to intensive experience. Ironically, only a

dreamer might actually climb Moneta's stairs. As she informs him, "None can usurp this height' ... / 'But those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest..." (147-9). Logically, he expects that there would be "thousands in the world... Who love their fellows even to their death, / Who feel the giant agony of the world" (156-7). But she explains that he has reached her temple alone because those who love humanity "are no visionaries / ...they are no dreamers weak" (161-2):

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
What benefit canst thou, or all thy tribe,
To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing,
A fever of thyself...
(163-9)

Though Moneta casts into doubt the value of visionary poetry, certain phrases ("they have no thought to come," "for thou art less than they") suggest an extraordinary quality to the poet's "lessening" into a pre-personal dreaming. These hints of sympathy toward the deterritorializing dreamer are reinforced by the increasingly vital way in which Moneta responds to him, one of the strangest virtual effects of the poem. He stirs Moneta to a sort of human feeling even before he gazes into her mild yet "planetary" eyes. A disorienting virtuality is invoked through repetition and subtle verbal shifts in the strange descriptions of the veil that surrounds her:

The tall shade veil'd in drooping white
Then spake, so much more earnest, that the breath
Moved the thin linen folds that drooping hung
About a golden censer from the hand
Pendent . . . (194-8)

At first, the "thin linen folds," which seem to hang from her head to her feet, are "moved" slightly by her increasingly "earnest" breath. Then, the "thin folds of gauze" are actually "stirr'd" and her voice is filled with tears that have long been cherished, or withheld:

Then the tall shade, in drooping linen veil'd,
Spoke out, so much more earnest, that her breath
Stirr'd the thin folds of gauze that drooping hung
About a golden censer from her hand
Pendent; and by her voice I knew she shed
Long-treasured tears. (216-21)

Finally – as she offers to share the immortal memories (the “scenes / Still swooning vivid through [her] globed brain / With an electrical changing misery”) that for her are a painful “curse” but that for him may be a “wonder” or wonderful pain – her tones become almost maternal, though the robes still fill him with uneasy terror. The curtain of “mysteries” evokes the Wordsworthian “burden of the Mystery” – but, arguably, the poet-dreamer’s attention is toward the etho-ecological rather than toward “sad pieties” or hierophantic, religious mysteries:

As near to a mother’s soften were these last:
And yet I had a terror of her robes,
And chiefly of the veils from her brow
Hung pale, and curtain’d her in mysteries,
That made my heart too small to hold its blood.
This saw that Goddess, and with sacred hand
Parted the veils. (249-56)

Describing her as “sad Moneta” (the “Shade of Memory” and “pale Omega of a wither’d race”) he sees a “ferment” behind her brow. This association of modern lyric with a brain in ferment, faced with a cold inanimate world, after the “thunder of a war . . . by giant hierarchy / Against rebellion” (222-4) has an important precursor in one of Coleridge’s best known poems, centered on the figure of the lyre.

In *Dejection: An Ode*, Coleridge depicts a kind of distempered lyre, cut off, after the trauma of the French Revolution, from natural feeling, or trapped in an optics of life-in-death. In this respect, Book 11 of Wordsworth’s *Prelude* can likewise be read as a long reflection on the ways in which modern sensationalism ruptures the lived event and impairs the imagination. When

Coleridge (echoing Wordsworth's "the things which I have seen I now can see no more") cries, "I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!" (39), and swiftly concludes, "I may not hope from outward forms to win / The passion and the life, whose fountains are within" (45-46), he hints at the foreclosure of experience, even if he makes ineffectual recourse to the soul: "And from the soul itself must there be sent / A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth" (56-57).

Ironically, for Coleridge, only the violent rage of the storm (the admission of violent historical immediacy rather than pastoral, Arcadian idealization) can re-illumine his "blank eye" or "startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!" (19-20). Yet the "Mad Lutanist" (104), whose music echoes "the rushing of a host in rout," gives way to the "tender lay" of a frightened "little child" lost "Upon a lonesome wild" (105-125):

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,
Reality's dark dream!
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,
Which long has raved unnoticed.
(94-97)

Arguably, this "raving" wind hardly resolves or consoles the dark dream of history. Rather, Coleridge seems to take a perverse pleasure in his ghastly, gothic vigils, despite his many wishes that his friend be spared such vigils, and visited instead by "gentle Sleep! with wings of healing."

For Coleridge, romantic lyric is "infected" (92) with "viper thoughts" (94), so that he is placed across an unbridgeable divide from the lady, a figure of idealized, innocent lyric rejoicing. By contrast, the high lady, Moneta, in Keats's *Fall of Hyperion* is a figure of historical time. She has "an immortal sickness which kills not," a kind of sibylline inability to die despite (or perhaps because of) the "electral changing misery" and "scenes / Still swooning vivid" through her "globed brain." As Moneta is immortal, those memories have an immortal life, vivid and "electral," though she herself – cold, pale, "curtain'd...in mysteries," holding back the tears of her experience,

“ministering” to the altar of a titanic past – progresses infinitely toward death. With a gaze of “blank splendour,” blind as the “mild moon, / Who comforts those she sees not” (269-70), she is a figure of intensive-yet-impersonal time.

In contrast, then, to the poet of *Dejection: An Ode*, who figures himself cut off from the source of natural feeling by historical awareness, the poet of *The Fall of Hyperion* gazes directly into lyric’s incurable engagement with time. Its “wakeful anguish” (*Ode on Melancholy*) and “giant agony” of a “burning brain” (393)²⁰⁴ implies haptic rather than optic attention:

Without stay or prop
But my own weak mortality, I bore
The load of this eternal quietude,
The unchanging gloom and the three fixed shapes
Ponderous upon my senses, a whole moon;
For by my burning brain I measured sure
Her silver seasons shedded on the night,
And every day by day methought I grew
More gaunt and ghostly.
(388-96)

Where, in *Hyperion*, Apollo undergoes the apotheosis, in *The Fall of Hyperion*, the poet-dreamer himself comes to know death in life (dying to himself) and to “see as a god sees.” It is “too late” for worship and the “fond believing lyre” (*Ode to Psyche* 37) but not for a different sort of poetic attention to the fane within the psyche itself, a space of intensive time.

Thus, though the poet-dreamer’s condition is one of illness, or “unworthiness,” he embraces this deterritorializing less-ness as a noble increase in ethical sensitivity: “In sickness not ignoble, I rejoice” (FoH 184). Again, in one of the most complex moments in the poem, he enquires into the merit of poetry, referring to the poet as “a sage; / a humanist, physician to all men” (189-90)

²⁰⁴ This insistence on wakeful anguish offers an interesting contrast to the implication in Coleridge’s *Dejection: An Ode* that the poet does in fact prefer the frenzy of the “mad lutanist” despite his protestations of the value of naïve harmony.

but apparently excluding himself from the category of poet, asking, “What am I then: Thou spakest of my tribe: / What tribe? (193-4). The implication is that he knows he is not the physician, but the one who is “ill” (or sick with too much awareness). Moneta’s answer confirms this:

... ‘Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?
The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
The one pours out a balm upon the world,
The other vexes it.’”
(198-202)

He offers no balm, consolation, or medicine but a “vexing” ailment – the sickness of being a dreamer irremediably exposed to intensivity. This adds a strong ambivalence and irony to lines that seem to praise the poet (in contrast to the dreamer):

...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.
(186-90)

Arguably, as began by mentioning, critics have tended to misread Keats’s poet/dreamer distinction. For instance, Noel Jackson reads the dream-vision narrator of *The Fall of Hyperion* as poet rather than dreamer, and argues that he defends his tribe (poets) against the charge of being mere dreamers:

In well-known lines from *The Fall of Hyperion*, the figure of the poet defends the charge that he is but a ‘dreaming thing’ (JK 166), and poetry no different from a dream. His response is to the question put to him by the interrogatory goddess Moneta, who asks, ‘What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe, / To the great world?’ (JK 187-188). Keats’s poet replies in defense of his ‘tribe’: unlike the dreamer, whose reveries merely vex the world, the poet ‘pours out a balm’ to soothe and heal it. (Jackson 133)

Contrary to Jackson’s reading, the implication of the passage is that the dreamer attends to the intensivity of historical (intensive, more-than-isolated) time, while the poet soothes over historical

time.²⁰⁵ The dream-vision narrator may express the hope that poetry, in its conventional or extensive sense, goes into the “world’s ear” with a kind of mollifying influence, but Moneta quickly corrects him as to his tribe, which is not the poet’s but the dreamer’s:

Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?
'The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
'Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
'The one pours out a balm upon the world,
'The other vexes it.'

Hearing this, the dream-vision narrator immediately expresses his scorn for conventional poets or “mock lyrists, large self worshipers,” wishing them all dead:

...Then shouted I
Spite of myself, and with a Pythia's spleen,
'Apollo! faded! O far flown Apollo!
'Where is thy misty pestilence to creep
'Into the dwellings, through the door crannies
'Of all mock lyrists, large self worshipers,
'And careless Hectorers in proud bad verse.
'Though I breathe death with them it will be life
'To see them sprawl before me into graves.

By implication, melodies sung into the world’s ear *are* useless if they console or lull rather than vex. The vital thing is to expose a subject in passing to the full force of the complexity of intensive time. Aesthesis, then, is not simply pleasure or opiate but “the wakeful anguish of the soul” (*Ode on Melancholy* 10).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ My use of the term “historical” here may be confusing, as I have pointed to the shortcomings of historical materialist critique. And history, after all, is a confusing term in itself, if one considers that history is generally the after-narration (and mastery) of interrelational events. Here though I use the word “historical” in ways that complement historical materialist critique) in contrast with the notion of the merely fictional.

²⁰⁶ Interestingly, both *The Fall of Hyperion* and *Ode to Psyche* figure poetry as a song sung into an ear, but in the former the ear is that of the world, which needs soothing, and in the latter, the ear is that of the goddess Psyche, less a personification of the psychological than of the etho-ecological. *Ode to Psyche* foregrounds the fact that poetry *is* intensity. In Keats, attention *is* that “living death” (that “gush of sounds” and “new blissful golden melody”). This insistence on wakeful anguish offers an interesting contrast to the implication in Coleridge’s *Dejection: An Ode* that the poet does in fact prefer the frenzy of the “mad lutanist” despite his protestations of the value of naïve harmony.

To conclude, I return to Keats's striking metaphor of singing Psyche's secrets back into her "own soft-conched ear" because it brings home the notion that the poet, in producing the silent song of poetry, through practice of a creative form that requires complex and integrated activity of both the technical and emotional aspects of the embodied mind, in some sense not only invokes but also actualizes the intensivity or sympoiesis of the late-born goddess, Psyche. Here, the Keatsian figures of ear and conch come together, in a condensed image of the listening ear as the world-producing conch:

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-conched ear...

3 Keats and Shelley's Virtual Ecologies: imagination, dreaming, intensivity

"This is what Spinoza calls Nature: a life no longer lived on the basis of need, in terms of means and end, but according to production, a productivity, a potency, in terms of causes and effects" (SPP 3).

i. "communion with the invisible world"

To read second-generation romantic dream-vision poems, such as Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* (1822) and Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* (1819) as "virtual ecologies" (Guattari), is to find in them more than "ecomimetic" (Morton) eloquence^{lvi} that recompenses for the loss of originary

pleasure.²⁰⁷ Dreaming, in these poems, is very much the wakeful, painful pleasure of aesthesis, or the intensity that consciousness conceals.²⁰⁸

Like Blake, the second-generation romantics drive intensely beyond the “I” or centered attention toward “immediate / Communion” (*Laocoön*) or toward “communion with the invisible world” (*The Prelude*), or beyond egocentrism to the counter-cognitive ecocentrism that Guattari called virtual ecology. *The Fall of Hyperion* and *The Triumph of Life* are, hence, composed of dreams within dreams within dreams: self-obliterating synaesthetic figural “turnings,” weird structural foldings on a “writing plane,” a site of “involution, in which form is constantly being dissolved, freeing times and speeds” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 294). These poems reverse the Miltonic “fall” into rational “independence” (the optics of isolated location) through a Dantesquean descent into counter-cognition.

²⁰⁷ Self-consciousness is, ostensibly, the reason for this loss of pleasure or relation. Instead of arguing (along skeptical, critical materialist lines) that nature poetry aims (and fails) to substitute for that loss with deliberate and contrived lyricism, I am suggesting (along speculative materialist lines), that nature poetry can actually point past the optic mode of isolated consciousness toward etho-ecological attention, which is not some romantic myth or fantasy, but a definite potential of each human being, only temporarily foreclosed by modern epistemic regimes.

²⁰⁸ Implied in this is both an intensification of Wordsworth’s aesthetic ontology and a critique of the residual egoism, or emotionalism, that ultimately led to the conservatism and pessimism of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s later work. In effect, I am arguing that the second generation romantics, whose main influence was Wordsworth, shared Blake’s chief criticism of Wordsworth. Like Blake, they objected to the empiricist concept of “nature” as outward “Creation” (*naturata*), which Wordsworth subverts and questions but never, perhaps, fully relinquishes. What Shelley and Keats share with Blake is a more thoroughgoing critique of centered optics and foreclosed perception. Like Blake, they approach self-centered consciousness as “consolidated error,” and thoroughly undermine the cultural and perceptual reifications that limit attention. Recognizing this connection between Blake and the second generation romantics is important, I think, because it rethinks the stakes of romantic poetry not simply as aesthetic and organicist but as etho-ecological and attentional. The hidden etho-ecological connection between Blake and Keats, in particular, interests me, as both Blake and Keats lived and wrote from a socially subordinate position. Keats might seem antithetical to Blake, given his reputation as an aesthete and as an atheist, but this antithesis proves superficial if one considers their common insistence on inspiration or on un-barred attention. Romantic poetry never shies from this proposition that communion is possible.

Both *The Triumph of Life* and *The Fall of Hyperion* exhibit a similar formal logic: the poet-dreamer, through trials of wakefulness (staying up all night, or climbing a marble stair that, in the logic of dreams, turns all but the most single-minded into stone) faces the agony of the world and is driven to ask for a revelatory perception that will explain “why” it is thus. To their requests for the cleansing of perception, the poet-dreamers receive, rather than answers, complex visions of ceaseless transformation, a blissful transexperiential flow experienced traumatically by centered agents who tragically seek isolated identity.²⁰⁹

At the beginning of *The Fall of Hyperion*, the dream-vision poet, managing to ascend a cold marble stair before the “gummed leaves” of sacrificial incense burn away on the altar high above, asks the “High Prophetess” to ““purge off, / Benign, if so it please thee, my mind’s film”” (145-6) and insists on parting Moneta’s veils to see “what things the hollow brain / Behind environ’d: what high tragedy / In the dark secret chambers of her skull” (275-6). Likewise, in *The Triumph of Life* the dream-vision poet, witnessing the cold “car of light” exclaims, ““And what is this? / Whose shape is that within the car? and why? –” (177-8). After reviewing with Rousseau²¹⁰, the kinds of “figures” that pass on the world’s “fragile glass,” or that “ever new... rise on the bubble” (247-9), he is again moved to ask:

‘Whence camest thou and whither goest thou?
How did thy course begin... and why?
‘Mine eyes are sick of this perpetual flow
Of people, and my heart of one sad thought. –
Speak.’ (296-300)

The hollow-eyed, twisted figure of Rousseau in turn recounts to the dream-vision poet how he encountered the feminine “shape all light” in a grove of forgetting, and asked her:

²⁰⁹ As de Man has suggested, the poem disfigures “thought’s empire over thought” (ToL 211). Yet, I would argue that the “shape all light” that de Man locates at the core of the poem is not as vacuous or vitiated (arbitrary, rhetorical) as it may seem.

²¹⁰ A strangely terrestrial psychopomp, compared to Virgil in *The Inferno*.

... 'If, as it doth seem,
Thou comest from the realm without a name
'Into this valley of perpetual dream,
Show whence I came, and where I am, and why –
Pass not away upon the passing stream.'
(395-99)

Shelley's repeated theme of figuration that quells itself²¹¹ involves a *via negativa* (reflected in the poem's recursive dantesque *terza rima*) travelled not only imaginatively, in symbolic transitions to an underworld or to the landscapes of a "lower" threshold of consciousness, but also cognitively, in the sense of a more intensive, deterritorialized mode of cognition (the counter-actualization of mundane and reifying commonsense). Again, one might say that the poem drives toward a kind of sympoietic, ontic intensivity vital to well-being – a mode to which the brain naturally tends, but which modernity has curbed. In that sense, the "counter-cognitive" drive of the dream-vision poem is to "desanitize" (Rajan) attention.

Another word for the virtual in both romantic poetry and in Whitehead's philosophy of organism is etho-ecological "tenderness" or love. Rousseau's breathless request, "Pass not away upon the passing stream" conveys, in the poem's chain-pattern rhythm of continuous transfiguration, this tension between stasis and flux, emotion and affect. In that sense, though the two poems were written in ignorance of one another, Shelley answers the more Miltonic theme of a paradise lost, in Wordsworth's dream of the Arab, with the Dantesquean theme of "How all things are transfigured, except Love" (476). Crucially, Shelley's figure of poiesis, the feminine "shape all light" to which a nostalgic Rousseau addresses himself, is herself the trampler and blotter of thought, her rhythmic (or metrical) 'feet' putting out the "embers" of the gazing mind:

'And still her feet, no less than the sweet tune
To which they moved, seemed as they moved, to blot
The thoughts of him who gazed on them, & soon
'All that was seemed as if it had been not...

²¹¹ See de Man's "Disfiguring Shelley."

She is the intensivity that, in each moment, undoes extensivity. To attend to that intensivity, those moving “feet,” is to experience the transformation of attention.

ii. “That I might drink, and leave the world unseen”

As I have been suggesting, it is perhaps in Keats, more than in any other romantic, that the brainwaves of eros, poetry, and dreaming appear as complex forms of extra-neuroaesthetic attention that undo the experiencer: not a balm and not simply a medicine, but the “pleasant pain” of “proofings” that are “alterers” (To George and Georgina Keats, April 21 1819) of one’s nature. “Soul-making,” in this sense, is not the making of a centered identity but something between Deleuze’s constructivist “becoming-minor” and Evan Thompson’s enactivist “self-ing.” Such an intense awareness of aesthetic-becoming may seem both painful and excessive, yet the poet-dreamer of *The Fall of Hyperion*, famously announces, “In sickness not ignoble, I rejoice” (184). He prefers the open-ended, incurable “sickness” (of the “dreamer” who feels the “giant agony of the world”) to the ideological consolations of the “fanatic” who weaves a “paradise for a sect” (*The Fall of Hyperion* 1-2).^{lvii}

This intensified awareness of aesthetic subjectivity bears a certain kinship to altered or heightened states of trance, hallucination, and dreaming. Repeatedly in Keats, the poet imagines himself into counter-cognitive and counter-cultural landscapes, through ritual ingestion of an opiate-like elixir. In the open passages of *The Fall of Hyperion*, the dream vision is explicitly linked to the imbibing of an intoxicant, which can “rapt unwilling life away” and turn the imaginer

into the imagined, “The cloudy swoon came on, and down I sank, / Like a Silenus on an antique vase.” The downward motion of this image suggests a deterritorialization, recalling the lines from *Ode to a Nightingale*, “That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, / And with thee fade away into the forest dim...”

Perhaps the most striking instances, in both Keats and Shelley, of this lessening into etho-ecological experience are their dream-vision landscapes or virtual ecologies. In the landscape of dark flowers in *Ode to a Nightingale*, the poet, transported (first by a song and then by an elixir) into a dream, cannot even see, but “must guess,” the flowers:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Likewise, in the tranced summer night in *The Fall of Hyperion*, a dreaming forest serves as a metaphorical setting for the sound of Thea's voice as she speaks into Saturn's ear, within a poem that is itself a 'gleaning' of "memory" at the "open doors" of the "antechamber" of a "dream" (*The Fall of Hyperion* 1.465-8):

As when upon a tranced summer-night
Forests, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
Dream, and so dream all night without a noise,
Save from one gradual solitary gust
Swelling upon the silence, dying off,
As if the ebbing air had but one wave,
So came these words and went....
(I 372-378)

This elaborate conceit (likening an imaginary goddess's words to the "one wave" of the breath of wind passing through a dreaming forest) foregrounds an ontic language of the senses, prehended

in sensitive attention. Poetry step down this “large utterance” into “our feeble tongue” (FoH 351-3), or makes etho-ecological affections intelligible to human knowledge. As Mnemosyne tells the poet-dreamer in the opening of Canto II:

‘Mortal, that thou mayst understand aright,
I humanize my sayings to thine ear,
Making comparison to earthly things;
Or thou mightst better listen to the wind,
Whose language is to thee a barren noise
Though it blows legend-laden thro’ the trees...’
(2.1-6)

Human ears, the passage implies, are deaf to the etho-ecological, hearing only a “barren noise” in a world that breathes a “legend-laden” breath. Yet verse undoes this insensibility, plunging the reader into a work of visualization that effects a sense of transport into a zone of virtual ecology. The medieval “methought” (which traditionally signals a dream-vision) signals this “fall” or plunge into intensivity:

Methought I stood where trees of every clime,
Palm, myrtle, oak, and sycamore, and beech,
With plantain, and spice blossoms, made a screen;
In neighbourhood of fountains, by the noise
Soft showering in my ears, and, by the touch
Of scent, not far from roses. Turning round
I saw an arbour with a drooping roof
Of trellis vines, and bells, and larger blooms,
Like floral censers swinging light in air...

The *Triumph of Life*, too, continually represents the poet-dreamer’s drive toward the virtual. When the sun springs into the world and “delegates” its labors, the nocturnal and counter-actual poet falls into a trance. He perceives the actual and virtual simultaneously, and in the midst of that double awareness, a deterritorializing vision is “rolled” upon his brain.^{lviii}

To reprise, second generation dream-vision poems are ventures into an intensive mode of attention. The *via negativa* happens, as it were, along the spiral of the conch-like ear. Like dreaming, poesis involves a transition from optic to haptic attention, or from isolated

consciousness to interrelationship.^{lix} This emphasis on the event of attention is prominent in first generation romantic verse, but intensifies in Keats' and Shelley's dream-vision poems.

Keats and Shelley themselves expressed this reply to first generation romantic aesthetics by shifting their figure of poetry from lyre to conch. Where the lyre image suggests that the composition of poetry is like the composition of music, the conch image suggests, more radically, that both poetry and music are expressions of an etho-ecological intensity indivisible from the act of listening. This etho-ecological attention neither mimics nor transcends the world but in fact dissolves it into infinite interrelation. As Keats put it, in a letter to his brothers, "This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration" (*Letter to George and Tom Keats*, 22 December 1818).

In Keats and Shelley, intensity is not the symptom of a fall from reality into shadows of the real; it *is* reality, which cannot be meaningfully separated from sensitive attention *to* reality.²¹² Again, the structural similarity of their major dream-vision poems cannot be overemphasized. The dream-poet in *Hyperion* asks veiled Moneta to "purge off, 'Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film'" just as Rousseau in *The Triumph of Life* asks the feminine "shape all light" to "Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why." Likewise, both drink from the cups of these figures of the divine feminine, who grants a more intensive vision within the vision. In both poems, one event seems to blot out the one that preceded it.^{lx} What these poems stage and provoke, then, is a shift from inattention to attention, is the reversal of modernity's tendency to reinforce the optic mode

²¹² One could read modernity, as reflected in British Romantic poetry, as a world for which the esemplastic portals of the brain were closing, particularly in Keats poems like *Lamia*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and *Ode to Psyche*.

(isolated, “masculine,” centered consciousness) at the expense of the haptic mode (relational, “feminine,” etho-ecological feeling).

There is something “extra real”²¹³ in these visions, which “unfold” or “pour like sand” on the self-oblivious mind. Keats, in particular, famously casts himself in his letters as the anonymous poet of “no self,” who in a room full of people, ceases to exist. While this sense of extra-being is sometimes attributed to his sensuousness, it is, I would argue, better attributed to an etho-ecological mode of attention.²¹⁴ It may be useful, then, to map the virtual ecologies that unfold in Keats as well as Shelley. As I have already looked at the entry into the garden of night in Keats’s *Ode to Psyche*, I would like to look closely at the contrasting visions of process from the point of view of day (the actual) and night (the virtual)²¹⁵ in *The Triumph of Life*.²¹⁶

²¹³ Arguably, the natural supernaturalism with which Coleridge describes Wordsworth as being concerned, in composing poems for *Lyrical Ballads*, is directed realistically – more toward the etho-ecological than toward religious superstition.

²¹⁴ Whitehead is emphatic that the “concrete” is the fact of flow, though modern thought has mistakenly identified the concrete with static objects (abstractions).

²¹⁵ Not to overlook the importance of transitional moments (e.g., dawn) in *The Triumph of Life*.

²¹⁶ Close reading of *Mount Blanc*, through a speculative realist lens, brings forth the crucial doubleness of vision in Shelley. This suggests an alternative to de Man’s famous new historicist reading of *The Triumph of Life*, in “Disfiguring Shelley.” Organic figures of streams and vines in *Mount Blanc* and *The Triumph of Life* mirror a similar twining, braiding, or weaving motion in the text itself. And yet, as I have been attempting to argue, how one perceives this weaving – as sign of a fall away from pure reality into vitiating and deficient representations, or as the transfiguration of all things by love or interrelation – depends very much on whether one valorizes the extensive or the intensive, the intellectual or the affective.

4 "Oblivious Melody"

"Yes, Percy... we got the memo." Cornel West

The opening lines of Shelley's thought-obliterating *The Triumph of Life*, beg the question of whether the sun speeds to a "task / Of glory and of good" or to a "task" sinister. The chain-pattern terza rima, the sibilance of the lines, and the unsettling harshness of the consonants (culminating in the word "mask") foster a Dantequean sense of uneasiness with the enlightenment proposition that "darkness" is indeed falling "from the awakened Earth":

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task
Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth
Rejoicing in his splendor, and the mask
Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth.
(The Triumph of Life 1-4)

Ostensibly, this acting sun is not the "true sun." The emphatically masculine, despotic, biopolitical sun is implicitly linked to the shrouded, shadowy, blind-folded figure in the "cold bright car" of diurnal "Life." As the aggressively "hastening," imperial dawn arrives, the dream-poet narrator – having kept vigil beneath the "wakeful" stars "that gem / The cone of night" (22-3), rapt in thoughts that for unexplained reasons "must remain untold" (21) – recedes from conventional consciousness into a strange trance. In body, he sits on a hillside, and remains lucidly conscious of the dawn on the hills even as a "Vision" on his "brain was rolled" (ToL 40). He finds himself on a dusty "public way" where a "great stream" of people like "gnats upon the evening gleam" hurry "to & fro." The members of this confused multitude, all but "the sacred few who could not tame / Their spirits to the Conqueror" (128-9), have subjected themselves to "Life," making themselves captives to conventional "means and ends."

Here, I will gloss *The Triumph*, almost after the fashion of Coleridge's gloss of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.²¹⁷ One must begin, again, with the opening contrast that the poem sets up between the ordered day of the imperial sun, where each thing has its designated productive task, and the non-instrumental dream-state of the poet:

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task
Of glory & of good, the Sun sprang forth....
And in succession due, did Continent,
Isle, Ocean, & all things that in them wear
The form & character of mortal mould
Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear
Their portion of the toil which he of old
Took as his own & then imposed on them;
But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold
Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem
The cone of night....

As the industrious world of day imposes itself, a "strange trance" grows over his "fancy":

before me fled
The night; behind me rose the day; the Deep
Was at my feet, & Heaven above my head
When a strange trance over my fancy grew
Which was not slumber....

He knows it is not sleep because he remains lucidly aware of both states of consciousness, as if not only aware of two different visions of the world, but of the "transparent" veil between them:

...for the shade it spread
Was so transparent that the scene came through
As clear as when a veil of light is drawn
O'er evening hills they glimmer; and I knew
That I had felt the freshness of that dawn,
Bathed in the same cold dew my brow & hair
And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn
Under the self same bough, & heard as there
The birds, the fountains & the Ocean hold
Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air.
And then a Vision on my brain was rolled.

²¹⁷ Partly in recognition of the influence that Coleridge's poem, which broke with conventional categories by casting itself as both gothic and medieval, may have had on this, Shelley's last, unfinished poetic effort

Apparently, the “veil of light” refers to the last light on distant hills, at evening, which, to the defamiliarized observer, appears less a world of sunlight than simply a film upon the world. Oddly, in this image, two liminal temporalities are superimposed on one another: the light on the evening hills and the freshness of dawn. The dream-poet asserts that he knew he was *also* experiencing the actual dawn, supplementary to his vision. Yet, some kind of difference that makes a difference has occurred. The instrumentality and productivity of the Day has been subtly transformed, or has been “enamoured” as suggested in his hearing “The birds, the fountains & the Ocean hold / Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air.”

If this doubleness of perception (this state between dreaming and waking) is not odd enough, it ushers in a full-fledged vision: “And then a Vision on my brain was rolled.” It is as if his “trance of wondrous thought” leads into a “waking dream.”^{lx} And yet, the medieval “Methought” tokens, perhaps, a more complete transition into a dream vision, if only because, it suggests that he actually *thought* he was sitting beside a “public way”:

As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay
This was the tenour of my waking dream.
Methought I sate beside a public way
Thick strewn with summer dust, & a great stream
Of people there was hurrying to & fro
Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam....

As I have suggested, what follows seems to be a vision of the “spiritual” form of the world of day – less a world of natural order, where each thing knows its task, but a world of human confusion, in which men like “gnats” hurry about:

All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know
Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
He made one of the multitude, yet so
Was borne amid the crowd as through the sky
One of the million leaves of summer's bier...

The vision takes in the whole of human experience, or the continuous process by which infancy turns into old age, blending these life stages in the image of a “mighty torrent,” or revealing the ways in which what appear to be individual hopes and sorrows are collective processes, with particular (and increasing) emphasis on the psychological states into which human beings fall, unable to perceive that they are, one and all, engrossed with the “serious folly” of passing things, and insensible to the creative, relational beauty of the event:

Old age & youth, manhood & infancy,
Mixed in one mighty torrent did appear,
Some flying from the thing they feared & some
Seeking the object of another's fear,
And others as with steps towards the tomb
Pored on the trodden worms that crawled beneath,
And others mournfully within the gloom
Of their own shadow walked, and called it death...
And some fled from it as it were a ghost,
Half fainting in the affliction of vain breath.
But more with motions which each other crost
Pursued or shunned the shadows the clouds threw
Or birds within the noonday ether lost,
Upon that path where flowers never grew;
And weary with vain toil & faint for thirst
Heard not the fountains whose melodious dew
Out of their mossy cells forever burst
Nor felt the breeze which from the forest told
Of grassy paths, & wood lawns interspersed
With overarching elms & caverns cold,
And violet banks where sweet dreams brood, but they
Pursued their serious folly as of old

It is then that the dream-poet becomes aware of a greater agitation in the throng, and the presence of “a cold glare, intenser than the noon / But icy cold” which obscures the sun even as the sun obscures the stars:

And as I gazed methought that in the way
The throng grew wilder, as the woods of June
When the South wind shakes the extinguished day.—
And a cold glare, intenser than the noon
But icy cold, obscured with [[blank]] light

The Sun as he the stars...

What follows is a characteristically difficult Shelleyan conceit that likens the cold light to the “young moon” near dusk, behind which one can see the faint image of the full moon, making the new moon seem “the ghost of her dead Mother”:

Like the young moon
When on the sunlit limits of the night
Her white shell trembles amid crimson air
And whilst the sleeping tempest gathers might
Doth, as a herald of its coming, bear
The ghost of her dead Mother, whose dim form
Bends in dark ether from her infant's chair...

So came the chariot, the passage tells us, “on the silent storm / Of its own rushing splendour,” again, suggesting more than anything else, a thing that heralds a great shift between day and night, consciousness and imagination:

So came a chariot on the silent storm
Of its own rushing splendour, and a Shape
So sate within as one whom years deform
Beneath a dusky hood & double cape
Crouching within the shadow of a tomb,
And o'er what seemed the head, a cloud like crape,
Was bent a dun & faint ethereal gloom
Tempering the light...

The “Shape” within the chariot is hooded, caped, and deformed by time, “Crouching within the shadow of a tomb,” with a “cloud like crape” of “dun & faint ethereal gloom” over its head, which tempers the light. Apparently, the chariot also has a driver, in the form of a “Janus-visaged Shadow” (if this is not the same entity as the gloomy Shape), who guides not horses but indeterminate winged “Shapes” that draw it “in thick lightnings”:

...upon the chariot's beam
A Janus-visaged Shadow did assume
The guidance of that wonder-winged team.
The Shapes which drew it in thick lightnings
Were lost: I heard alone on the air's soft stream

The music of their ever moving wings.

The charioteer, or “Janus-visaged Shadow,” has “four faces” all with “eyes banded,” leading the dream-poet narrator to comment on the pointlessness of speed when one can see neither before nor behind one, and also on the pointlessness of that cold light, which otherwise might enable the charioteer to “pierce the sphere / Of all that is, has been, or will be done.”

In brief, the image of the chariot is an image of exceedingly “ill-guided” modernity, blind though equipped with more optical power than the tyrannical sun of rational consciousness:

All the four faces of that charioteer
Had their eyes banded . . . little profit brings
Speed in the van & blindness in the rear,
Nor then avail the beams that quench the Sun
Or that his banded eyes could pierce the sphere
Of all that is, has been, or will be done.—
So ill was the car guided, but it past
With solemn speed majestically on . . .

At this point, the public throng changes into a “maniac dance,” or the kind of “jubilee” that occurred in Imperial Rome when prisoners were freed to rush into the streets to greet a homecoming conqueror. Here, the correlation between the sun in the opening lines of the poem, and of the chariot of cold light, is palpable, only it is as if the spiritual form of modernity is even more blind, tyrannical, and insane than that of the older order:^{lxii}

The crowd gave way, & I arose aghast,
Or seemed to rise, so mighty was the trance,
And saw like clouds upon the thunder blast
The million with fierce song and maniac dance
Raging around; such seemed the jubilee
As when to greet some conqueror's advance
Imperial Rome poured forth her living sea
From senatehouse & prison & theatre
When Freedom left those who upon the free
Had bound a yoke which soon they stooped to bear.

It turns out the “captive multitude” that rolls before the chariot, in this macabre dance of history, consists of all those who have traded joy for power, taming “Their spirits to the Conquerer,” with the exception of the few (like Socrates and Jesus) who could not do so:

Nor wanted here the true similitude
Of a triumphal pageant, for where'er
The chariot rolled a captive multitude
Was driven; altho' who had grown old in power
Or misery,—all who have their age subdued,
By action or by suffering, and whose hour
Was drained to its last sand in weal or woe,
So that the trunk survived both fruit & flower;
All those whose fame or infamy must grow
Till the great winter lay the form & name
Of their own earth with them forever low,
All but the sacred few who could not tame
Their spirits to the Conqueror, but as soon
As they had touched the world with living flame
Fled back like eagles to their native noon,
Of those who put aside the diadem
Of earthly thrones or gems, till the last one
Were there;—for they of Athens & Jerusalem
Were neither mid the mighty captives seen
Nor mid the ribald crowd that followed them
Or fled before...

The wild dance of history grows “fierce & obscene,” as the captives mix “to savage music... tortured by the agonizing pleasure,” as if driven by the devil, “Convulsed & on the rapid whirlwinds spun / Of that fierce spirit, whose unholy leisure / Was soothed by mischief since the world begun”:

Now swift, fierce & obscene
The wild dance maddens in the van, & those
Who lead it, fleet as shadows on the green,
Outspeed the chariot & without repose
Mix with each other in tempestuous measure
To savage music Wilder as it grows,
They, tortured by the agonizing pleasure,
Convulsed & on the rapid whirlwinds spun
Of that fierce spirit, whose unholy leisure
Was soothed by mischief since the world begun...

It then becomes clear that the figure in the chariot is female, around which “Maidens & youths” dance wildly, “Like moths attracted & repelled,” going to their own destruction:

Throw back their heads & loose their streaming hair,
And in their dance round her who dims the Sun
Maidens & youths fling their wild arms in air
As their feet twinkle; they recede, and now
Bending within each other's atmosphere
Kindle invisibly; and as they glow
Like moths by light attracted & repelled,
Oft to new bright destruction come & go....

The chariot passes over them, who are like: “...foam after the Ocean's wrath... spent upon the desert shore.” In its wake, ostensibly, the devitalized maidens and youths become “Old men, and women foully disarrayed / Shake their grey hair in the insulting wind, / Limp in the dance & strain, with limbs decayed, / Seeking to reach the light which leaves them still / Farther behind & deeper in the shade.” At this point, the dream-poet encounters his guide or psychopomp:

Struck to the heart by this sad pageantry,
Half to myself I said, "And what is this?
Whose shape is that within the car? & why"-
I would have added—"is all here amiss?"
But a voice answered . . . "Life" . . . I turned & knew
(O Heaven have mercy on such wretchedness!)
That what I thought was an old root which grew
To strange distortion out of the hill side
Was indeed one of that deluded crew,
And that the grass which methought hung so wide
And white, was but his thin discoloured hair,
And that the holes it vainly sought to hide
Were or had been eyes.—

A withered, vestigial, root-like figure entreats him to forbear to join the dance of history, in order to hear the story of the “progress of the pageant since the morn,” which (the figure seems to suggest) may suffice to abate his “thirst of knowledge”:

"If thou canst forbear
To join the dance, which I had well forborne,"

Said the grim Feature, of my thought aware,
"I will now tell that which to this deep scorn
Led me & my companions, and relate
The progress of the pageant since the morn;
"If thirst of knowledge doth not thus abate,
Follow it even to the night, but I
Am weary"

The root-like vestige informs him that he was once Rousseau, who “feared, loved, hated, suffered, did, & died” before the dream-poet’s memory, and then explains that those chained to the car were great historical figures who “feigned” the “morn of truth” and failed to know themselves or to “repress the mutiny within”:

"And who are those chained to the car?" "The Wise,
"The great, the unforgotten: they who wore
Mitres & helms & crowns, or wreathes of light,
Signs of thought's empire over thought; their lore
"Taught them not this—to know themselves; their might
Could not repress the mutiny within,
And for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night
"Caught them ere evening."

Napoleon appears among those chained figures, to the dream-poet’s surprise, leading him to reflect on the opposition between “power & will”:

...I felt my cheek
Alter to see the great form pass away
Whose grasp had left the giant world so weak
That every pigmy kicked it as it lay—
And much I grieved to think how power & will
In opposition rule our mortal day—
And why God made irreconcilable
Good & the means of good; and for despair
I half disdained mine eye's desire to fill
With the spent vision of the times that were
And scarce have ceased to be . . .

Figures such as Kant and Catherine the Great also appear, as people of great ambition who met defeat: "For in the battle Life & they did wage / She remained conqueror—." This is one of the

first clear implications that the female figure in the car is Life. Witnessing this leads the dream-poet to engage in a rather Shakespearian (and Wordsworthian) anguished reflection on futility:

—"Let them pass"—
I cried—"the world & its mysterious doom
"Is not so much more glorious than it was
That I desire to worship those who drew
New figures on its false & fragile glass
"As the old faded."—"Figures ever new
Rise on the bubble, paint them how you may;
We have but thrown, as those before us threw,
"Our shadows on it as it past away.

Their conversation then reflects the Dantesquean tour that Rousseau gives of the various figures chained to the car, with much the same message as *The Divine Comedy*, that love alone rescues mortality. In a remarkable image, Shelley condemns both kings and popes as hierarchs whose authority "rose like shadows between Man & god":

Till that eclipse, still hanging under Heaven,
Was worshipped by the world o'er which they strode
For the true Sun it quenched.
"Their power was given
But to destroy"...

Here, the implication may be that the sun that rises with the poem's opening lines is indeed not the "true Sun" (which possibly refers to Christ, in the sense of love and forgiveness rather than power and judgment). At this point, the dream-poet addresses Rousseau, asking:

"Whence camest thou & whither goest thou?
How did thy course begin," I said, "& why?
"Mine eyes are sick of this perpetual flow
Of people, & my heart of one sad thought.—
Speak."—

He replies that he does not know how he came to this pass, or where "the conqueror" is leading him, but invites him to follow along and turn from spectator to "actor or victim," so that "what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn / From thee." At this point Rousseau abruptly relates his

extraordinary vision of the “figure all light.” Apparently, his first memory after life was of awaking under a mountain near a “gentle rivulet” and a grove replete with sounds that bring Lethian forgetting”:

Now listen . . . In the April prime
When all the forest tops began to burn
"With kindling green, touched by the azure clime
Of the young year, I found myself asleep
Under a mountain which from unknown time
"Had yawned into a cavern high & deep,
And from it came a gentle rivulet
Whose water like clear air in its calm sweep
"Bent the soft grass & kept for ever wet
The stems of the sweet flowers, and filled the grove
With sound which all who hear must needs forget
"All pleasure & all pain, all hate & love,
Which they had known before that hour of rest:
A sleeping mother then would dream not of
"The only child who died upon her breast
At eventide, a king would mourn no more
The crown of which his brow was dispossesst
"When the sun lingered o'er the Ocean floor
To gild his rival's new prosperity.—
Thou wouldst forget thus vainly to deplore
"Ills, which if ill, can find no cure from thee,
The thought of which no other sleep will quell
Nor other music blot from memory—
"So sweet & deep is the oblivious spell.—

In the “oblivious spell” of this sweet music, he seems to have forgotten his life before:

Whether my life had been before that sleep
The Heaven which I imagine, or a Hell
"Like this harsh world in which I wake to weep,
I know not.

He stands and explores his surroundings, finding that the light is gentler and diviner than that of the common Sun... on the common Earth” and that the place is “filled with many sounds woven into one / Oblivious melody”:

I arose & for a space
The scene of woods & waters seemed to keep,

"Though it was now broad day, a gentle trace
Of light diviner than the common Sun
Sheds on the common Earth, but all the place
"Was filled with many sounds woven into one
Oblivious melody, confusing sense
Amid the gliding waves & shadows dun...

The light of the morning sun fills the "orient cavern," apparently casting on the waters, or on the "vibrating / Floor of the fountain," a dance of sun motes so brilliant that it appears to be itself a kind of fountain of light, or "shape all light," flinging "Dew on the earth, as if she were the Dawn." This figure of Dawn, adorned with rainbows, swiftly becomes identified with the sweet oblivious melody, her "invisible rain" transmitting a "silver music":

"And as I looked the bright omnipresence
Of morning through the orient cavern flowed,
And the Sun's image radiantly intense
"Burned on the waters of the well that glowed
Like gold, and threaded all the forest maze
With winding paths of emerald fire— there stood
"Amid the sun, as he amid the blaze
Of his own glory, on the vibrating
Floor of the fountain, paved with flashing rays,
"A shape all light, which with one hand did fling
Dew on the earth, as if she were the Dawn
Whose invisible rain forever seemed to sing
"A silver music on the mossy lawn,
And still before her on the dusky grass
Iris her many coloured scarf had drawn.—

Here Rousseau finds that the figure of Dawn bears a drug of forgetfulness or balm for sorrow: "In her right hand she bore a crystal glass / Mantling with bright Nepenthe." By contrast, Moneta, in *The Fall of Hyperion*, grants the poet-dreamer a vision or remembrance that makes his brain burn, in an intense access of more-than-human memory. Nevertheless, both Dawn's "balm" and Moneta's vision of "woe, / 'Too huge for mortal tongue" can be read, I would argue, as figures for

poetry and the intensive vision it offers.²¹⁸ Casting “fierce splendour,” Dawn glides, almost hovering, above the river, amid the soft shadow of the trees, and becomes an explicit figure for poetry:

²¹⁸ When, in an extraordinary passage, the poet-dreamer looks into the “benignant light” of sad Moneta’s “planetary eyes,” a “film” is “purged” from his mind, so that he can see directly what happened to the old gods. Moneta’s words, remote at first, “to a mother’s soften”, as she parts the veils for him to reveal her “bright blanch’d” face, afflicted with an “immortal sickness which kills not... deathwards progressing.” Her eyes “Half closed, and visionless entire... / Of all external things... in blank splendour beam'd like the mild moon.” She offers him a glimpse of what she sees in her undying, unobscured memory:

'My power, which to me is still a curse,
'Shall be to thee a wonder; for the scenes
'Still swooning vivid through my globed brain
'With an electral changing misery
'Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold,
'Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not.'

Moved, the poet-dreamer beseeches her to grant him the vision, and immediately finds himself in a deep wood before the huge figure of the fallen Saturn, whose mournful voice sends “Strange musings to the solitary Pan” and is heard by all the “self-hid” or “prison-bound” Titans:

'Shade of Memory!'
Cried I, with act adorant at her feet,
...pale Omega of a withered race,
'Let me behold, according as thou saidst,
'What in thy brain so ferments to and fro!'
No sooner had this conjuration pass'd
My devout lips, than side by side we stood
(Like a stunt bramble by a solemn pine)
Deep in the shady sadness of a vale...

Moneta had promised that his “dull mortal eyes” would be “free from all pain,” and experience only wonder, in viewing this scene, but gazing a “long awful time” on the “frozen God” and “sad” and “silent” Goddess, he tells us that, with “burning brain” suffered the “load of this eternal quietude” so intensely that he “pray’d / Intense, that Death would take me from the vale”:

Without stay or prop
But my own weak mortality, I bore
The load of this eternal quietude,
The unchanging gloom, and the three fixed shapes
Ponderous upon my senses, a whole moon.
For by my burning brain I measured sure
Her silver seasons shedded on the night,
And ever day by day methought I grew
More gaunt and ghostly. Oftentimes I pray'd

And her feet ever to the ceaseless song
 "Of leaves & winds & waves & birds & bees
 And falling drops moved in a measure new...
 "And still her feet, no less than the sweet tune
 To which they moved, seemed as they moved, to blot
 The thoughts of him who gazed on them, & soon
 "All that was seemed as if it had been not,
 As if the gazer's mind was strewn beneath
 Her feet like embers, & she, thought by thought,
 "Trampled its fires into the dust of death,
 As Day upon the threshold of the east
 Treads out the lamps of night, until the breath
 "Of darkness reilluminates even the least
 Of heaven's living eyes—like day she came,
 Making the night a dream...

At this point, Rousseau calls out to the Dawn figure:²¹⁹

...and ere she ceased
 "To move, as one between desire and shame
 Suspended, I said—'If, as it doth seem,
 Thou comest from the realm without a name,
 "'Into this valley of perpetual dream,
 Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why—
 Pass not away upon the passing stream.'

Just as in the Hyperion poems, the divine feminine figure grants a more intensive vision within the vision:

"'Arise and quench thy thirst,' was her reply,
 And as a shut lily, stricken by the wand
 Of dewy morning's vital alchemy,
 "I rose; and, bending at her sweet command,
 Touched with faint lips the cup she raised,
 And suddenly my brain became as sand
 "Where the first wave had more than half erased
 The track of deer on desert Labrador,
 Whilst the fierce wolf from which they fled amazed
 "Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore
 Until the second bursts —so on my sight
 Burst a new Vision never seen before.—..

Intense, that Death would take me from the vale...

²¹⁹ Echoing the moment in *The Fall of Hyperion* when the dream-poet calls out to sad and planetary-eyed Moneta: "High Prophetess,' said I, 'purge off, 'Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film'".

But then, day comes in earnest, and the “fair shape” vanishes, a moment described by analogy to the experience of waking early to sense Venus in the sky, “the presence of the fairest planet,” and hoping to end one’s day (and perhaps one’s life) as one began it, “In that star’s smile”:

"And the fair shape waned in the coming light
As veil by veil the silent splendour drops
From Lucifer, amid the chrysolite
"Of sunrise ere it strike the mountain tops—
And as the presence of that fairest planet
Although unseen is felt by one who hopes
"That his day's path may end as he began it
In that star's smile, whose light is like the scent
Of a jonquil when evening breezes fan it,
"Or the soft note in which his dear lament
The Brescian shepherd breathes, or the caress
That turned his weary slumber to content.—

Here, it seems the day’s light is one of “severe excess” (that of the car), in which he can no longer see the shape all light, thus become “A light from Heaven whose half extinguished beam... Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost”:

"So knew I in that light's severe excess
The presence of that shape which on the stream
Moved, as I moved along the wilderness,
"More dimly than a day appearing dream,
The ghost of a forgotten form of sleep
A light from Heaven whose half extinguished beam
"Through the sick day in which we wake to weep
Glimmers, forever sought, forever lost.—
So did that shape its obscure tenour keep
"Beside my path, as silent as a ghost;
But the new Vision, and its cold bright car,
With savage music, stunning music, crost
"The forest, and as if from some dread war
Triumphantly returning, the loud million
Fiercely extolled the fortune of her star.—

The passage is perhaps deliberately ambiguous, subtly implying that the creative and intensive shape all light (Dawn or Venus) becomes the destructive and extensive (crone-like) figure of Life:

"A moving arch of victory the vermilion
And green & azure plumes of Iris had
Built high over her wind-winged pavilion,
"And underneath aetherial glory clad
The wilderness, and far before her flew
The tempest of the splendour which forbade
Shadow to fall from leaf or stone;— the crew
Seemed in that light like atomies that dance
Within a sunbeam.—

Again, we are in the world of day, where people vainly seek preoccupation (“all like bubbles on an eddying flood / [falling] into the same track”):

Some upon the new
"Embroidery of flowers that did enhance
The grassy vesture of the desert, played,
Forgetful of the chariot's swift advance;
"Others stood gazing till within the shade
Of the great mountain its light left them dim.—
Others outsped it, and others made
"Circles around it like the clouds that swim
Round the high moon in a bright sea of air,
And more did follow, with exulting hymn,
"The chariot & the captives fettered there,
But all like bubbles on an eddying flood
Fell into the same track at last & were
"Borne onward.—

Rousseau presents himself as the only one who rejects transitory pleasures and distractions, to plunge into that “cold light”:

I among the multitude
Was swept; me sweetest flowers delayed not long,
Me not the shadow nor the solitude,
"Me not the falling stream's Lethean song,
Me, not the phantom of that early form
Which moved upon its motion,—but among
"The thickest billows of the living storm
I plunged, and bared my bosom to the clime
Of that cold light, whose airs too soon deform.—

Here, the dream-poet invokes Dante directly, and his theme (“How all things are transfigured, except love” and how the world cannot hear “the sweet notes that move / The sphere whose light

is melody to lovers”), recounting (a “wonder” worthy of Dante’s rhyme) the moment when the grove grows dense with shadows or phantoms:

"Before the chariot had begun to climb
The opposing steep of that mysterious dell,
Behold a wonder worthy of the rhyme
"Of him whom from the lowest depths of Hell
Through every Paradise & through all glory
Love led serene, & who returned to tell
"In words of hate & awe the wondrous story
How all things are transfigured, except Love;
For deaf as is a sea which wrath makes hoary
"The world can hear not the sweet notes that move
The sphere whose light is melody to lovers—
A wonder worthy of his rhyme— the grove
"Grew dense with shadows to its inmost covers,
The earth was grey with phantoms...

What follows is a vision of the ways in which human beings vitiate themselves, producing shadows that drain them of strength and beauty, and yet indulging in preoccupation with those very shadows, or materialistic forms:

& the air
Was peopled with dim forms, as when there hovers
"A flock of vampire-bats before the glare
Of the tropic sun, bring ere evening
Strange night upon some Indian isle,—thus were
"Phantoms diffused around, & some did fling
Shadows of shadows, yet unlike themselves,
Behind them, some like eaglets on the wing
"Were lost in the white blaze, others like elves
Danced in a thousand unimagined shapes
Upon the sunny streams & grassy shelves;
"And others sate chattering like restless apes
On vulgar paws and voluble like fire.
Some made a cradle of the ermined capes
"Of kingly mantles, some upon the tiar
Of pontiffs sate like vultures, others played
Within the crown which girt with empire
"A baby's or an idiot's brow, & made
Their nests in it; the old anatomies
Sate hatching their bare brood under the shade
"Of demon wings, and laughed from their dead eyes

To reassume the delegated power
Arrayed in which these worms did monarchize
"Who make this earth their charnel.

The shadows are a kind of phantasmic and vampiric brood that springs from thought, and which drains the youth and life out of human beings:

...—Others more
Humble, like falcons sate upon the fist
Of common men, and round their heads did soar,
"Or like small gnats & flies, as thick as mist
On evening marshes, thronged about the brow
Of lawyer, statesman, priest & theorist,
"And others like discoloured flakes of snow
On fairest bosoms & the sunniest hair
Fell, and were melted by the youthful glow
"Which they extinguished; for like tears, they were
A veil to those from whose faint lids they rained
In drops of sorrow.—

Horridly, the dream-poet realizes that the vitiated (and vitiating) forms that fill the grove proceed from human beings, falling from them "like dust," and that "each one / Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly / These shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blow":

...I became aware
"Of whence those forms proceeded which thus stained
The track in which we moved; after brief space
From every form the beauty slowly waned,
"From every firmest limb & fairest face
The strength & freshness fell like dust, & left
The action & the shape without the grace
"Of life...

It is "of this stuff" (these masks after masks that fall "from the countenance and form of all") that the "car's creative ray" makes the "busy phantoms":

And of this stuff the car's creative ray
Wrought all the busy phantoms that were there
"As the sun shapes the clouds —thus, on the way
Mask after mask fell from the countenance
And form of all, and long before the day
"Was old, the joy which waked like Heaven's glance

The sleepers in the oblivious valley, died,
And some grew weary of the ghastly dance
"And fell, as I have fallen by the way side,
Those soonest from whose forms most shadows past
And least of strength & beauty did abide."—

The phantoms are rather like thoughts or thought-forms that “soar” around the “heads” or throng “about the brow,” like “small gnats & flies, as thick as mist,” of various classes of people, from emperors and pontiffs to “lawyer, statesman, priest & theorist.” The poet-dreamer has declared that this is a “wonder worthy of the rhyme / Of him whom from the lowest depths of Hell / Through every Paradise & through all glory / Love led serene...” The comparison of his own vision to that of Dante suggests that, like *The Inferno*, *The Triumph of Life*, is a political allegory, exposing the macabre depths of the normative social world. It also suggests the Shelley’s purpose is not simply negative and pessimistic. Behind this turbulent world of material striving, the allusion to Dante implies, Shelley too, as dreamer-poet, hears the “sweet notes” that truly “move” the universe. Like Dante, the dreamer-poet is one

....who returned to tell
"In words of hate & awe the wondrous story
How all things are transfigured, except Love;
For deaf as is a sea which wrath makes hoary
"The world can hear not the sweet notes that move
The sphere whose light is melody to lovers—

If all things are transfigured except love, then the status or nature of “melody” remains slightly ambiguous. Apparently, love, like light, is a constant, and yet its “sweet notes” move the (true, not impostor) sun. Here, a certain undecidability enters. What does it mean, “sweet notes that move / The sphere whose light is melody to lovers”? Reading backwards, one can say that light is melody to lovers because lovers see beauty. As Blake remarked, they do not see a “guinea” sun,²²⁰ but “an

²²⁰ “I assert, for myself, that I do not behold the outward creation, and that to me it is hindrance and not action. ‘What!’ it will be questioned, ‘when the sun rises, do you not see a round disc of fire somewhat

innumerable company of the heavenly host crying ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!’” According to the logic of Shelley’s lines, what moves this sun, and all the stars, are “the sweet notes” of love, or “the Good” (Plato) itself. Following that Platonic logic, the shadowy phantoms transfigured on the false glass of the world are at a secondary or tertiary remove from the light that the sweet melody moves primarily. Their passing transformations are mere shadows of reality. Shelley emphasizes the unreal and vitiated quality of these shadows, comparing them to a mist of gnats bred on “evening marshes” or a “flock of vampire-bats” hovering in the “glare / Of the tropic sun” at “evening” on “some Indian isle.” One can recognize in these “dim forms” a likeness to the “multitude” on the “public way,” with which the poem began, “hurrying to & fro / Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam, / All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know / Whither he went, or whence he came, or why.”²²¹ This later vision of the phantoms in the grove seems to reveal the public world in what Blake might call its “spiritual” form. It reveals the deeper cause of human suffering, in thoughts and desires that vitiate attention to, or awareness of, the etho-ecological event. To bring this home, Shelley not only compares the shadows to blood-sucking swarming things, but also to a kind of toxic snow that might remind twenty first century readers of the correlative detritus that falls in a nuclear winter.

like a guinea!’ Oh ! no, no ! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!’ I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it, and not with it.”

A Vision of the Last Judgment

²²¹ As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay
 This was the tenour of my waking dream.
 Methought I sate beside a public way
 Thick strewn with summer dust, & a great stream
 Of people there was hurrying to & fro
 Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,
 All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know
 Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
 He made one of the multitude, yet so
 Was borne amid the crowd as through the sky
 One of the million leaves of summer's bier.—

"And others like discoloured flakes of snow
On fairest bosoms & the sunniest hair
Fell, and were melted by the youthful glow
"Which they extinguished; for like tears, they were
A veil to those from whose faint lids they rained
In drops of sorrow.

The phantom forms themselves proceed, he realizes, from something akin to "dust" that falls from the multitude: "From every form the beauty slowly waned, / 'From every firmest limb & fairest face / The strength & freshness fell like dust, & left / The action & the shape without the grace / 'Of life... / each one/ Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly / These shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blown / 'In Autumn evening from a popular tree..."

People, caught in the "ghastly dance" of life grow weary and wan, exuding shadowy images of themselves, which quickly lose definition, providing "stuff" from which the "the car's creative ray" can mould the "busy phantoms":

Each, like himself & like each other were,
At first, but soon distorted, seemed to be
"Obscure clouds moulded by the casual air;
And of this stuff the car's creative ray
Wrought all the busy phantoms that were there
"As the sun shapes the clouds—thus, on the way
Mask after mask fell from the countenance
And form of all, and long before the day
"Was old, the joy which waked like Heaven's glance
The sleepers in the oblivious valley, died,
And some grew weary of the ghastly dance
"And fell, as I have fallen by the way side,
Those soonest from whose forms most shadows past
And least of strength & beauty did abide."—

Having suggested that life is a phantasmagoric dance, where worries, desires, and carries literally become the phantasms and miasms that feed on the "strength & freshness" of human beings, the unfinished poem ends enigmatically:

"Then, what is Life?" I said . . . the cripple cast
His eye upon the car which now had rolled

Onward, as if that look must be the last,
And answered "Happy those for whom the fold
Of ...

Who are those “happy” ones, and what is the “fold”? What is Rousseau’s reply to the question, “what is Life?” We are left with no answer. In his final work, Shelley looks squarely at the hellish aspect, not only of his own times, but of the stream of worldly human experience, but, like Dante, affirms within it a sweet if little heard music. One can safely assume that what he calls “Life” is the destructive, not the creative, aspect of the world’s unceasing transformation. In that sense, like Blake, he reverses the usual terms, exposing the sun and its so-called order and light as tyrannical. Perhaps he situates himself on the side of the dark: promiscuous rather than pure, feminine rather than masculine, relational rather than rational. In that sense, the dream-poet does not affirm society, and what society calls life, but all of those intensive interrelations to which society is insensitive. At the heart of this complex, involutory work, at the furthest remove from ordinary consciousness, in a dream within a dream within a dream (and still then only indirectly, through the narration of the poem’s psychopomp, Rousseau), one finds Shelley’s figure of poiesis, the feminine “shape all light,”²²² the trampler and blotter of thought. Distinct transitions in the poem, between contrasted modes of experience, thus make it impossible to equate Life (extensivity, masculinity) with poetry (intensivity, femininity), or the sweet music, to which modernity is deaf. Poetry is “Earth’s” deterritorializing “Answer” to the Urizenic “holy” one, consciousness.²²³

²²² Perhaps if this “shape all light” could speak, it would speak with Oothoon’s deterritorializing voice: “I cry: Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain wind!.... Arise, and drink your bliss, for everything that lives is holy!” (VDA 190-214).

²²³ Poetry, in this sense, is not “Life” (extensive time, the optic) but intensive interrelation (love, the haptic), a “tentacular intrusion” into the abstract optics of the “astral gods” (Haraway). In Whitehead’s etho-ecological terms, poetry is “the feeling of derived feelings” or of “entwined mutual prehensions” (PR 82) that “finds its own reward in the immediate present” (PR 343).

“The mentally disturbed do not employ the Principle of Scientific Parsimony: the most simple theory to explain a given set of facts. They shoot for the baroque.” Philip K. Dick, *Valis*

Coda: “Tender as a nursing Mother’s heart” (13:207): the gruesome problem of reanimating the mother in *Frankenstein* and *The Prelude*

As an epilogue to this study, I propose to bridge two of British Romanticism’s most disparate texts, *The Prelude* and *Frankenstein*, one a lengthy autobiographical poem that seeks reconciliation with nature, and the other an innovative, decentered, polyphonic modern novel featuring an unreliable narrator. If *The Prelude* has been a father to modern nature poetry, *Frankenstein* stands as an example not only of dark romanticism but also as an uncanny mother to the genre of science fiction. Why bridge them here, in a work that is primarily about Blake, not Wordsworth?

My designs in doing so are twofold. First, simply in chronological terms, this study has attempted to trace a trajectory from Wordsworth to Blake to the second-generation romantics. In many ways, I read Mary Shelley as the “last” of the second-generation romantics, and I see *Frankenstein* as having the “last word” on British romanticism. Second, as this study has also, in the main, attempted a speculative feminist reading of the British Romantics (particularly Blake), I would be greatly remiss to omit discussion of Mary Shelley, a forerunner of both speculative fiction and speculative feminism. Third, in the course of this speculative feminist reading of the British Romantics, I have broken with the chronological trajectory to draw parallels between Blake and Dickinson. Arguably, if there is a broken linkage between Blake and Dickinson, it is Mary

Shelley. All three share a certain winking impertinence toward the grotesquery of modern, masculine, egocentric optics. All might equally be said to share an “ethos of affirmative reticence and recessive action” (Francois) that moves toward beauty rather than the sublime. Finally, the direct contrast *Frankenstein* makes between animation by “an almost supernatural enthusiasm” (or by ideas) and animation by “an active spirit of tenderness” (or by etho-ecological sympathy) serves, I believe, as a fitting conclusion to my general discussion of the key romantic contrast between optics and haptics.

Read with an eye to sublimity, both *The Prelude* and *Frankenstein* are compulsive narrations about a “series” (*Frankenstein* 224) of feelings. Both tell a “mutilated” story (*Frankenstein* 213) of the will to be more than a grotesque assemblage of organs. Yet, read with an eye toward beauty, both tell the deeper story of a communion that precedes mutilation. What appears the weaker power offers the more reliable remedy, perhaps precisely because the soft power of tenderness is ordinary: dependent on no grand access of reason at the summit of exertion, beauty requires only relaxation. Rather than escape oneself into pure, abstract oneness, one softens into what Wordsworth calls “fellowship” (1:442). The senses are quietly liberated from an ersatz sense of solitary selfhood, “quicken[ed], rous[ed], and made thereby more fit / To hold communion with the invisible world” (13:104-105; emphasis added).²²⁴

²²⁴ In her reading of Wordsworth, Anne-Lise Francois offers a lucid account of this “open secret” of “uncounted experience” – an ordinary and easy encounter with “nonbeing” or “immanence.” The “lyric of inconsequence,” she writes, is transmitted “in a commitment to the possibilities of nonsequential connection” (Francois 45). Her emphasis, in reading Wordsworth, is on the light “reception of an eventless experience” (47) and the “ellipsis by which experience remains below the threshold of representation and unavailable to discursive knowledge [as] constitutive of experience itself... the very gentling or lessening of human experience – its diminishment to all but nothing – constitutes a more penetrating gift than the vision denied” (51). In a departure from the hermeneutics of suspicion that echoes Eve Sedgwick’s call for a more phenomenological approach, she invites us to take Wordsworth at surface value:

If both *The Prelude* and *Frankenstein* tell this deeper story of how false or “independent” reason kills felt relationship – or how a free child of feeling becomes a “slave of passion” (*Frankenstein* 29) – one text can, the other cannot, bring the mother (the reassuring ontological ground, the primary object) back to life. Victor Frankenstein finds that the “kindly influence” of “maternal nature” ceases “to act,” leaving him “fettered again to grief and indulging in all the misery of reflection,” striving to “forget the world, my fears, and more than all, myself” (98). Where *Frankenstein* stutters, raves, and screams, *The Prelude* sings. Frankenstein shuns “the face of man” after the murders (by the gigantic hands of his own invention) of William and Justine, but Wordsworth speaks of how he cured the self-inflicted intellectual violence done to his imagination (through politics) by walking the “public road”:

Thus moderated, thus composed, I found
Once more in Man an object of delight,
Of pure imagination, and of love
...sanguine schemes,
Ambitious virtues pleased me less; I sought
For good in the familiar face of life
...having gained
A more judicious knowledge of what makes
The dignity of individual Man,
Of Man, no composition of the thought,
Abstraction, shadow, imaged, but the man
Of whom we read, the man whom we behold
With our own eyes... (12:52-87)

This is to argue, overall, for reading Wordsworth “in terms of the beautiful rather than the sublime, remembering that the discourse of the beautiful traditionally emphasizes the sufficiency or adequacy of the subject’s representational and experiential powers (even and especially in the absence of a determinate object or positive content to that experience), and asserts, as scandalously as it does lightly, the ‘fact’ of satisfied desire – of eyes that have their fill, possess their object, and, nevertheless, miraculously, continue gazing. (53)

This reading suggests the strong hidden links between Wordsworth and Keats, providing an alternative explanation for their tendencies to imagine a fading into nonbeing: “The ‘beautiful’, especially as it fades into the hum of bored contentment and feminized domestic habit, represents one alternative to the despair of absolute presence shadowing the Western (anti)metaphysical tradition...” (53)

Solitude, for Wordsworth, leads to renewed social feeling, and renewed springs of language, relaxing those epistemic regimes that police etho-ecological (or more expansively social) experience. Initially, Victor feels the same way about the "solitude" and "sublimity" of nature, but the issue grows fraught for him. It is, after all, in solitude (and against ordinary social feeling) that he conducts the grisly research that leads him to invent the creature. Wordsworth's solitude may seem innocent. Victor's is not.

Quite early on, the reader is made aware that Victor is in pursuit of an exalted state of genius that would place him far above other mortals, if not above mortality. The parallels with Walton, on his suicidal quest into the ice, makes it plain that Victor's tragic flaw, from the start, is self-involvement. Walton's narrative makes most clear that this drive toward self-assertion was internalized from books he read as an ignored boy in his uncle's library, absorbing new myths of the autonomous enlightened agent. After failing in the poet's quest for sublime heights, Walton changes tack and becomes a solitary explorer. Mary Shelley's subtler point may be that poetic ambition (the goal of genius) is the same as scientific ambition: a manic compulsion by modern discourses – myths of "originary independence" (Yousef) – that artificially *animate* modern subjects.

This kind of animation, by social discourses rather than etho-ecological feeling, is a central theme of *Frankenstein*. Borrowing Sianne Ngai's quirky term "animatedness," one might argue that, in *Frankenstein*, the early nineteenth century discourse of vitalism is closely connected with heroic enlightenment identity. This masculine discourse has a split relationship with vitality: (1) it fears the excessive vitality and generativity of sheer life (agentless materiality personified as feminine Nature); (2) it is itself animated by obsessive-compulsive vitality.

An examination of the two distinct uses of the word “animated” in *Frankenstein* leads directly into questions of gender and technology. One could say that women are associated with animation by tenderness and men with animation by ideas. The former, apparently, is more threatening. Women (as “less-than-human” or “less-than-rational”) have thus required special policing, and have been made keepers of conventional codes, lest natural sweetness prove to be monstrous raw life. Hence, Victor’s ritual destruction of the female creature, potentially “ten thousand times more malignant” than the male creature, the probable primogenitor of a “race of devils” (*Frankenstein* 202-3).²²⁵ In *Frankenstein*, a core of natural sweetness or domestic affection extends to the “small circle” of the family. Yet, at the same time, the relationality of nature is figured as brute existence or “nonentity,” inhuman, monstrous, possessed of terrible vitality, a thing to be controlled and exploited.

The madness of modernity’s tendency to reduce vitality or zoe to brute, barren, threatening nature, stripping “electric” sensation of affect,²²⁶ is a major undercurrent of the novel. This theme of the split between etho-ecological animation (tenderness, sympathy) and discursive animation (mania, enthusiasm) is introduced early, in Victor’s account of his parents:

With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life, added to the active spirit of tenderness that animated both, it may be imagined that

²²⁵ “I was now about to form another being of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man and hide himself in deserts, but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species. Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” (*Frankenstein*, 202-203)

²²⁶ In Whitehead’s terms, dismissing the “sensa” as subjective impressions or “psychic additions” distinct from scientific materialism’s objective facts.

while during every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control, I was so guided by a silken cord that all seemed but one train of enjoyment to me... No human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself. My parents were possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence. (16-19; emphasis added)

The second is introduced in Victor's account of his creation of the creature:

Unless I had been animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm, my application to this study would have been irksome, and almost intolerable. To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death.... No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. (30-32; emphasis added)

Where Victor's parents are animated by "an active spirit of tenderness" or "spirit of kindness and indulgence," Victor, the young scientist, is animated by "an almost supernatural enthusiasm." His parents are guided by a "deep consciousness of what they owed toward the being to which they had given life," while the young Victor engages in an autocratic fantasy: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs." While his parents are selfless,²²⁷ Victor is self-obsessed. This distinction between two kinds of "animatedness" is, I would argue, crucial to Mary Shelley's critique of romantic electricity and so-called vitalism. Yet, the primary meaning of animatedness as tenderness, or interrelationship, is overlooked in recent scholarship (Denise Gigante, Paul Gilmore) on the ties between romantic organicism, romantic era vitalism, and the vitality in *Frankenstein*.²²⁸

²²⁷ At least by his own report. The novel suggests, rather, that his father took advantage of his mother's poverty to marry her, despite her youthful beauty and his advanced age. It also hints that the mother, as a figure of sacrifice, engages in selfless charity toward the un-agented *because* she has herself in all other ways surrendered her agency.

²²⁸ Gigante argues that the romantics undermined their own formal structures to indicate the monstrous vitality at work in organicism. Against this reading, *Frankenstein* points to monstrous vitality as a product of mania, or of the second type of compulsive animation. Gilmore argues that the romantics took up vital,

In Book X of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth describes the intellectual eye of enlightened discourse: isolating, non-relational, "independent," and zealous. Yet Mary Shelley seems to turn this criticism on the male romantic poetics themselves (including her husband, Percy), who, she implies, pursued the sublime at the cost of relationships. As Keats wrote (in a Letter to Richard Wodehouse of October 27th 1818), "I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer." In *Frankenstein*, Shelley takes this sublime compulsion to hyperbolic heights; more than to steal fire from the gods, Victor aspires to *be* a god, the creator and benefactor of a new species. His suffering is not noble but pathological; it is the result of an obsessive denial of the affections for the sake of an ideal.

Read this way, Wordsworth's aim to give "a substance and a life" to what he feels is not that different from Victor's aim of "bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" or of discovering the "passage to life." And ironically Victor creates a very Wordsworthian creature: one that develops the eloquence to express his feelings in the highest mode of enlightened sensibility. Yet, in spite of mastering the language of human sensibility, the creature is refused human community. An even deeper irony lurks here. The creature, as Nancy Yousef observes, is the outward embodiment of the grotesque ramifications of sensationalist theories of psychosocial development.

For Victor, as for his creature, solitude is increasingly less an event of etho-ecological relation and more a scene of sensationalist private psychology: "a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe" (93) but also the "only consolation – deep, dark, deathlike" (93). Victor no longer feels the influence of "maternal nature" (*Frankenstein* 98).^{lxiii} When he passes Mt. Blanc,

fluid electricity as (an analogue to) the power of words to flow across and change the masses. Against this reading, *Frankenstein* points to both the power of words and the powerful secret of vitalism as products of mania. Neither Gigante nor Gilmore note the first type of animation: affection, sweetness, tenderness, ordinary feeling.

just before his first conversation with the rational creature, resonances with *The Prelude*'s account of boyhood sensation (and its eventual replacement by a meditative sense of springs of sympathy that are without suffering)^{lxiv} seem palpable.²²⁹ For Victor, however, the "kindly influence" of deeply felt association, or of sympathetic imagination, loses its power to rescue him from "all the misery of reflection":

A tingling long-lost sense of pleasure often came across me during the journey. Some turn in the road, some new object suddenly perceived and recognized, reminded me of days gone by, and were associated with the light-hearted gaiety of boyhood. The very winds whispered in soothing accents, and maternal nature bade me weep no more. Then again the kindly influence ceased to act – I found myself fettered again to grief and indulging in all the misery of reflection. (98)

Author of a rational being, Victor has himself lost the sources, the "maternal" affective ties, of tender affection that might take him out of himself.²³⁰ Where the young Wordsworth finds interfusion with the active universe, Victor finds necessity (conditioning, arbitrary impingement)

²²⁹ Both Mary Shelley and Wordsworth pointed to the influence on their imaginations of a childhood spent in lonely and beautiful natural landscapes. One of Wordsworth's persistent themes is recompense, for the loss of the child's timeless original immediacy, of the mature adult's philosophical awareness of an enduring "primal sympathy," a credo famously expressed in the Immortality Ode:

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind. (184-191)

²³⁰ The Lucy poems, famously, communicate this very ambivalence between an empiricist and idealist view of matter. In that sense, *Frankenstein* might be read as part of a second generation romantic turn away from the Wordsworthian lyric poet (an orphic figure whose singing brings the rocks and trees to life, and whose emblem is the lyre) to the Keatsian figure of the dreamer (a more virtual or darkly ecological figure, whose emblem is the conch). Yet Wordsworth's lyric poet is not wholly orphic. It is not simply his music that moves the inanimate world to life. Rather, for him, the material world was always filled with tender affections.

and abjection. Like his daemon, Victor *is* an “outcast . . . bewildered and depressed.” His view is not zoocentric but thanocentric: “To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became acquainted with the science of anatomy: but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body” (52). In the sublime solitude of the Alps, a melancholic Victor ruminates on human physical susceptibility to mutable elements, seeing in indeterminacy not unconditional, interrelational creativity but brute, bare matter. The morbidity of his sensationalist view of human abjection to variations of pain and pleasure may remind us that anatomy²³¹ can destroy or deconstruct the illusion of being a ‘person’. One’s so-called inner experience may come to look like mechanical causation:

I looked on the valley beneath; vast mists were rising from the rivers which ran through it and curling in thick wreaths around the opposite mountains, whose summits were hid in the uniform clouds, while rain poured from the dark sky, and added to the melancholy impression I received from the objects around me. Alas! why does man boast of sensibilities superior to those apparent in the brute; it only renders them more necessary beings. If our impulses were confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free; but now we are moved by every wind that blows and a chance word or scene that that word may convey to us. (*Frankenstein* 100-101)

In an ironic reversal, Victor and his “daemon” take antipodal views of the necessity that ties psyche to soma. The daemon announces his goal of being a “necessary” being in the social sense – the sense of ties, bonds, and relations: “I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence” (106). Victor wants to undo the causes of his condition, but the oversized and awful “fiend” wants to lose his isolation in the micro-relations of beautiful social affections. In an age of empiricism, sense-impressions seem to multiply and magnify: the isolate person exposed to sense-impressions is a “necessary” being,²³² an automaton. The scientific search for, and alertness to, unseen causes only heightens this painful revivification.

²³¹ And what Evan Thompson has recently called “neuro-nihilism.”

²³² With interest ties to Massumi’s recent writing on micropolitics.

If the young scientist, “animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm” (*Frankenstein* 52) seems to flee “the active spirit of tenderness” that he says “animated” his parents (35), both Wordsworth and the “daemon” reject the “minutiae of causation” (53) for the “tranquility” of the “domestic affections” (56). In *The Prelude*, the poet is, in fact, presented as a nursing Mother, whose “heart; / Of female softness shall his life be full, / Of little loves and delicate desires, / Mild interests and gentlest sympathies” (13:205-210). Wordsworth sees our life beginning in affective influences between babe and mother (“the first / Poetic spirit of our human life”) that protect us from the “false secondary power” of conceptuality:

Like an awakening breeze...
From this beloved Presence, there exists
A virtue which irradiates and exalts
All objects through all intercourse of sense.
(2:237-60)

In an exhortation to Coleridge that clarifies both why Coleridge is the poem’s imagined interlocutor and how the poem responds to science, Wordsworth describes how reason binds sensation, and how, by implication, affect unbinds them:

...Thou, my Friend! Art one
More deeply read in my own thoughts; to thee
Science appears but, what in truth she is,
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
But as a succedaneum, and a prop
To our infirmity. Thou art no slave
Of that false secondary power, by which
In weakness we create distinctions, then
Deem that our puny boundaries are things
Which we perceive, and not which we have made.
To thee, unblinded by these outward shows,
The unity of all has been revealed... (2:216-227)

Though romanticists have tended to downplay the “pantheist” sympathy to which Wordsworth points,²³³ affect theory opens “the possibility of rethinking the world as literally *made* of feelings, of prehensive events” (*Semblance and Event* 85). This etho-ecological dimension or “vital politics” (Braidotti) of romantic poetry, which restores to realism a hitherto debarred attention to a feeling universe²³⁴ and to “multispecies wellbeing” (Haraway), is more urgent now than ever.^{lxv} Encouragingly, “romantic” insight into the etho-ecological nature of attention has been resurfacing today in what I have characterized as a postsecular turn in the humanities, or a “romancing” of modernity. I give the last word, then, to Massumi and to Blake:

Whenever we see, whenever we perceptually feel... we are taking in nonhuman occasions of experience. We are inheriting their activity, taking it into our own special activity as a *human* form of life: as a society of occasions of experience contributing to a continuing growth pattern it pleases us to call our human self. What we perceptually feel to be our ‘humanity’ is a semblance of that life. (*Semblance and Event* 26)

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Blake, *The Divine Image*

²³³ Timothy Morton reads *The Prelude* as an “ecomimetic” project that seeks, through ceaseless labor, to convert the material universe’s actual nonhuman alterity into normative aesthetics. In contrast, he reads *Frankenstein* as a counter-aesthetic project whose “stitches are showing” (*EwN* 194). For Morton, the disfigured figure of the creature is an image of early nineteenth century industrial England: “Frankenstein’s creature is... the ‘answer of the real’ whose very form embodies a terrible split: the horrific ugliness of alienated social cruelty, and the *painful eloquence* of enlightened reflection” (*EwN* 195 emphasis added). New Historicist criticism of the 1980s tended to read Wordsworth precisely in these terms, as a “painful eloquence” (a remarkable ability to wax poetic about his own exquisite sensations) that masked “alienated social cruelty.”

²³⁴ As Shaviro writes, “aesthetic feeling is how the world projects itself into, and remakes, the self” (*WC* 8).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Empiricist Subjectivity – A Detour into Modernity’s “Consolidated Error”

1 “I fear Wordsworth loves nature”: Blake, Wordsworth, and empiricist subjectivity

As critics such as Goodman, Quinney, and Yousef have noted, what troubled the romantics in Lockean empiricism was its “bifurcation of nature” (Whitehead), which implied the ceaseless intrusion of “dead” matter into subjectivity. Subjectivity, or human feeling in a mechanical universe, proved merely psychological; in particular, the intuitive-feeling aspect of imagination was reduced to a secondary process of associative reflection. In brief, empiricism excised felt relationship from its optics.

Yet Lockean optics (as Kevis Goodman’s *Georgic Modernity* brings to the fore) involves both a fantasy and a nightmare. The fantasy is that of enhanced perception, by which the rational observer feels a greater sense of control. The nightmare is of perception so enhanced that it sees something slightly agential in the microscopic swarm of immediacy – revealing the “invisibles” subtracted by the modern eye. What looked like objects (in accordance with sensible ideas) begin to look more like buzzing swarms of interrelations, or “powers” (Whitehead). In brief, there is the risk of an “enthusiasm” that reflection cannot manage in pleasurable, self-confirming ways.

One can read Wordsworth as a son of Locke, in this way. Like Locke, he seems to provide associative and reflective means of recentering the subject in a historical moment of disruptive overstimulation.^{lxvi} But, if Locke’s doctrine of “simple” passive sensation may seem similar to Wordsworth’s “wise passiveness,” to equate them would be to minimize the challenge Wordsworth poses to Lockean optics. Wordsworth emphatically insists upon an active seeing that encounters

the world imaginatively. Here, imagination is less a projection of fancy than the “negative” capacity to receive intimations and visitations from an interrelational universe.

That said, Blake scholars have argued that, at least through Blake’s eyes, Wordsworth was indeed up to something Lockean. In *William Blake on Self and Soul*, Quinney argues that Blake rejected the empiricism of the *early* Wordsworth, the poetry between 1798-1805 – which most critics consider his *least* dogmatic. She draws on recent scholarship to show that Wordsworth was a Lockean psychologist until he wrote his *Immortality Ode*, which was not published in its most widely known form until 1815. In response to Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey* and his *Prospectus*, Blake famously commented, “I fear Wordsworth loves nature.” However, when the diarist Crabb Robinson read him the *Immortality Ode*, Blake liked the Neoplatonic passages, or the shift from a doomed and melancholic effort at fleshing out the subjective or experiential consequences of empiricism, to a rejection of “dull and vacant” nature (Quinney 83) for a transcendental reality. But was Blake truly an idealist?

This question will be answered in due course. For that moment, the point is that Blake, according to Quinney, immediately grasped that Wordsworth’s attempt to work out in poetry the the implications of empiricist subjectivity would lead him into the contradictions or “Blank misgivings” (*Immortality Ode* 149) of Lockean identity. Empiricism, after all, opens a yawning divide between matter and mind, so that attempts to ground subjectivity in matter end in the gothic nightmare of life-in-death. Like Nancy Yousef, Quinney succinctly describes Locke’s account of the mind as a “metaphor of internment” (Quinney 34) in which the understanding is a dark room with little openings to let in sensation – a paranoid epistemology and inadequate imagining. Blake seems to respond directly to empiricist psychology in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where he writes, “For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ the narrow chinks of his cavern.”

Blake's metaphor for the constriction of experience to the optic (the informational, epistemological, rational) rather than haptic (the interrelational, metaphysical) is complemented by Quinney's analysis of the problem with the Lockean metaphor of the dark closet or camera obscura. As Quinney explains,²³⁵ the narrowness of the camera obscura makes the incursion of sense-experience (itself narrowly understood as bare sensation) all the more threatening. The influx of impressions disturbs centered identity, introducing a ceaseless material difference within the self – a sense not only of alienation, isolation, and bewilderment but of continuous vexation. Quinney refers to this as the “essential uneasiness of consciousness” (85), noting that we too easily forget that “the intuition of selfhood has always been perplexed in theory as well as in practice” (Quinney 3).

In this respect, Quinney reminds us that far from exclusively celebrating the richness of inner space, Wordsworth repeatedly lingers with this vexation or uneasiness. Yet, I would argue, he does so in a way that turns the tables, vexing empiricism psychology with a more radical “feeling for nature.” In Wordsworth's early poetry, and in the early books of *The Prelude*, his account of how a maternal nature infuses the developing subject with deep impressions and sensations of relation already vexes empiricist psychology because it points to the modifying incursions of matter into the locus of the observer: haptics rather than optics. This does not mean that Wordsworth ever lays his doubts to rest. As Blake discerned, and as Quinney emphasizes, he is tortured by ambivalence. If Wordsworth's early poetry sings of a “visitatorial” universe, this radical empiricist affirmation is haunted by the empiricist possibility that our faith in nature is misplaced.²³⁶

²³⁵ In ways that parallel Goodman's observation that, in the nineteenth century, the enhanced empiricist eye was a “fantasy-nightmare,” promising optic mastery but verging on the haptic.

²³⁶ In other words, in detecting the vexing ambivalence in Wordsworth's efforts at an affirmative sensationalism, Quinney points to the “fantasy-nightmare” of the enhanced eye that Goodman has diagnosed.

Whether or not Wordsworth was a son of Locke,²³⁷ it seems fair to say that he, like Percy Shelley (whose *Defence of Poetry* rails against calculation and celebrates electrical enthusiasms), was markedly anti-Smithian. The Smithian mind (premised on economic self-interest) is literally “cut off”: specific sense-data enter the theater of its skull, a vacuum of private experience.^{lxvii} Blake’s *Laocoön*²³⁸ makes it explicit that “art,” as the romantics approach it, is a counter-epistemological mode of experience that undoes the atomistic modern epistemic regime that constitutes subjects as “biopsychological” units of production, or “Satanic mills” (Makdisi):

The Eternal Body of Man is The IMAGINATION, that is God himself
 The Divine Body } יֵשׁוּעַ [Yeshua] JESUS we are his
 Members
 It manifests itself in his Works of Art (In Eternity All is Vision)

The True Christian Charity not dependent on Money (the lifes blood of Poor Families)
 that is on Caesar or Empire or Natural Religion
 Money, which is The Great Satan or Reason
 the Root of Good & Evil
 In The Accusation of Sin
 Prayer is the Study of Art Praise is the Practise of Art
 Fasting &c. all relate to Art The outward Ceremony is Antichrist
 Where any view of Money exists Art cannot be carried on, but War only (41-52)

When meditative nature poets speak of rousing us from the sleep of death into visionary imagination, “death” is the Urizenic “curb of flesh” (*Book of Thel*) that art reveals to be merely the modern epistemic limits set on the awareness of interrelationship - the negation, or “murder,” of “desire.” When Blake wrote, “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires” (MHH), he chooses such an extreme and vigorous image in order to highlight that the “infant in its cradle” (the love in our hearts) and the “unacted desire” are one and the same. It is to the conventional process of enclosing this love in the hard kernel of the isolated ego that Blake

²³⁷ Goodman suggests that Wordsworth deliberately kept alive the “buried” voice of a “georgic modernity” for which the politically and perceptually radical implications of empiricism are *not* curbed by aesthetic reflection.

²³⁸ As 3.4 examines.

protests, resorting to shock value in order to provoke awareness of the danger and harm of curbing the drive toward intensive interrelation, or circumscribing etho-ecological attention (the haptic) with centered perception (the optic).

2 Liberty and extra-being in Coleridge: “Possessing all things with intensest love”

This romantic model of freedom as the awareness of “immersion in the whole of nature,” insistently expressed in Blake and Wordsworth, invites a brief turn to Coleridge, who is otherwise regrettably underrepresented in this study. The final passage of Coleridge’s *France: An Ode* not only reminds us of the extent to which the first-generation romantics emerged, as poets, in the context of the political events of the 1790s, and their aftermath, but also highlights a romantic response to these events through the formation of an understanding of liberty as etho-ecological sensitivity (zoe) rather than individual-but-utilitarian legal right (bios).

Emphasizing the romantic distinction between sense (as commonsense preconception) and sensitive attention (as the event of interrelation), Coleridge expresses a resistance to sensationalist psychology.^{lxviii} The passage can be understood as both Burkean and Spinozist, in that it critiques the “mad game” of revolutionaries who “burst their manacles” but “rebel in vain,” remaining “Slaves by their own compulsion!” Implied is the argument that the revolutionary has burst the chains but retained the logic of an optics of atomistic or finite relation. His anthropomorphic figuration of liberty as a “soul” that does not “breathe” in “forms of human power” indicates less a soul-matter binary than an appeal to more-than-atomistic fluency:

The Sensual and the Dark rebel in vain,
Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game
They burst their manacles and wear the name
Of Freedom, graven on a heavier chain!
O Liberty! with profitless endeavour
Have I pursued thee, many a weary hour;
But thou nor swell'st the victor's strain, nor ever
Didst breathe thy soul in forms of human power.

Coleridge rejects both the “minions” of “priestcraft” and the “slaves” of “blasphemy,” depicting liberty as an elemental fluency (air, water) or “incorporeal materialism” (Foucault), which is experiential rather than discursive, to be felt as speed, at home in “homeless” rhythms.^{lxix}

Alike from all, howe'er they praise thee,
(Nor prayer, nor boastful name delays thee)
Alike from Priestcraft's harpy minions,
And factious Blasphemy's obscener slaves,
Thou speedest on thy subtle pinions,
The guide of homeless winds, and playmate of the waves!

He imagines or remembers himself on the “sea-cliff’s verge,” a high place, where solidity opens into fluidity, and where the human perspective opens onto an unbounded perspective. This seems to be the site where he can “feel” liberty as spirit, in the sense of more-than-bounded life. A tangible expression of this etho-ecological sympathy is the way the breeze moves the pines to make “one murmur” with the “distant surge”:

And there I felt thee!—on that sea-cliff's verge,
Whose pines, scarce travelled by the breeze above,
Had made one murmur with the distant surge!

In the final four lines, which have drawn ongoing critical attention, the poet foregrounds his gaze. Here, he becomes an image of the inspired, magic visionary with “flashing eyes” who has “drunk the milk of Paradise” (*Kubla Khan*), but notably with a sober exhilaration in the fresh air that speaks of a heightened perception that is clear-minded rather than opium-induced. Standing at the far limit of solid land, perhaps directing his attention to the vast spaces between, but not of either,

England and France, his “bare”²³⁹ temples exposed to active matter, he *shoots* his unencumbered being “through earth, sea, and air.” The possessive and “intensest love” of which he speaks appears to stand in the place of “fire,” to complete the elements:

Yes, while I stood and gazed, my temples bare,
And shot my being through earth, sea, and air,
Possessing all things with intensest love,
O Liberty! my spirit felt thee there.

With an affirming “Yes,” he describes an extension of his sense of “possession” beyond the bounds of the individual body into the extra-bodily world, a kind of naked, erotic intermingling, which might invite scruples of humanistic appropriation or self-projection.²⁴⁰ The repeated use of the word “my,” and the agency which the poet seems to ascribe himself, as the one who actively takes possession of experience, and seeks to feel the spirit of liberty, may strike one as an overly assertive expression of freedom, over and against the sensuous (unspiritual, materialistic) “slaves” for whom he has expressed pity if not scorn. The passage seems to declare, I know what freedom it is: freedom is pure being or imperial possession of matter, through the power of poetic attention, and of creative genius. One might critique this sentiment as a celebration of rarefied poetic sensibility, which transcends the sensuous via access to living form that is more ideal than sensuous. Raising the opposite objection, Frances Ferguson’s *Solitude and the Sublime* critiques the empiricism rather than idealism found in such romantic tropes of solitary and naked access to pure perception, noting the Burkean commitment to an “empirical sublime” that seeks a “naturalized” way out of “form” in the sense of contingent mediations or consensual representations.

²³⁹ Possibly a play on “temple” - as both house of the un-commercial spirit and as brow, naked of any affiliative hat.

²⁴⁰ Here one might pause to register, in Deleuze’s writing on the “control society,” the potentially positive resonances of the individual as opposed to the “dividual,” or the corporate reduction of subjects to bioinformatics.

In the midst of puzzling over which trespass Coleridge commits, into idealism or into empiricism, one might venture a less suspicious reading of this passage. The poet, after all, does not discover a reality that is, strictly speaking, non-social. Rather, his “inspired” attention involves a breathing in *of*, and a being-breathed into *by*, interrelations. An act of “sympathetic” magic takes place. The magician-poet sends his awareness into *natura naturans*, or, prehensively, into the event of a more-than-atomistic material universe: “the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which [man] knows, and feels, and lives, and moves” (Wordsworth). To possess all things is also to be possessed by all things, as the phrase “intensest love” suggests.

In brief, the poet points, through embodied experience, to an alternative model of freedom, not to be grasped as political power (the “heavier chain” and “profitless endeavor” of self-assertion) but felt in-and-as etho-ecological flow, unbarred by socially constituted sensation. One might still object that the passage is politically conservative, or that it valorizes abstract apolitical aesthetic and spiritual experience of autonomously accessed “interdependence” over “independent” yet collective political action. But one can also emphasize the passage’s rejection of the “modern doctrine” and its overtures toward postsecular modernity. Implicit in the idea of interdependence, for that matter, is the notion that a modification or transition in the so-called individual affects the communal. The scandal of Coleridge’s identification of liberty with personal and silent attention to extra-being is precisely its affirmation of an increase in the body’s power of acting, in almost-pagan or “regressive” (Stengers) trespass of a biopolitical modernity (or a sensationalist secularism) that amputates and cauterizes the boundaries of feeling.²⁴¹

²⁴¹ A t-shirt sold in support of Standing Rock, reads, “Listen to the wind, it talks, listen to the silence, it speaks, listen to your heart, it knows.”

Deeply versed in both Spinoza and Schelling,²⁴² Coleridge understood *natura naturans* as a “productive power” indivisible from “intelligence.” As Matthew Segall puts it, “[For Coleridge], [t]hat in nature which is generative is identical to that in the mind which is generative: the *nous poetikos*” (“What Barfield thought Coleridge thought”). Owen Barfield summarized: “the productive power, or *vis naturans*, which in the sensible world, or *natura naturata*, is what we mean by the word, nature, when we speak of the same as an agent, is essentially one (that is, of one kind) with the intelligence, which is in the human mind above nature.” Such a model of nondual, intensive, etho-ecological intelligence – in which “the poet taps into and expresses the very spirit which is still creating nature” (Segall) – would have, surely, run counter to the concerted effort of empiricists to sanitize sympathy of its affective implications. In her essay on Wordsworth,

²⁴² Reading Owen Barfield’s *What Coleridge Thought*, Segall writes:

Barfield’s most important contribution to contemporary philosophy (later articulated in *Saving the Appearances*) is perhaps his critique of “idolatry.” One worships an idol, in Barfield’s sense, “whenever the unobservable in nature is converted, for handling, into supposed observables” (p. 87, WCT). To do so is to assume that one phenomenon can explain another phenomenon, when clearly, an appearance cannot be a real cause of anything. If phenomena are thought to have real causes at all, they must be noumenal (i.e., supersensible). And in that case, the final real things aren’t extended things or sensible bodies at all, but invisible generative forces. For Coleridge, following the polar logic of Boehme and Bruno, there are two such forces united in a single Power:

“The polar forces are the two forms, in which a one power works in the same act and instant” p. 203, n. 24, WCT);

and again, this time summarized by Coleridge’s student J. H. Green:

“A one power, which manifests itself in opposite and correlative forces, or in distinctive relations at once opposite and reciprocally complemented, and which therefore perpetuates itself in living reality and totality by distinction in unity” (ibid., n. 25).

The human mind is not set apart from nature in this scheme, but discovered in the very heart of it. That in nature which is generative is identical to that in the mind which is generative: the *nous poetikos*. That which makes visible nature is that which erupts as Muse in the poet’s imagination. The poetic genius does not copy an already completed nature; rather, the poet taps into and expresses the very spirit which is still creating nature, there creating it anew.

(Segall, “What Barfield Thought”)

“Romancing Spinoza,” Marjorie Levinson hints, in passing, at the linkages between the politics implicit in “Coleridge's famous coinage, ‘multeity’ (‘multeity in unity’),” and the “scandal of Spinoza’s conatus,” which she finds “politically open-ended and even Utopian” in “its figuration of individual and collective identity as both enmeshed and as effects of active ‘composings’” (376). Here, one may be tempted to think note the commonalities between Coleridge’s dynamic notion of multeity (drawn from German romantic philosophers) and Erasmus Darwin’s famous speculation (in *The Temple of Nature*) about “transmigrating” atoms.²⁴³ But the two differ, I would argue, on the crucial question of the nature of sympathy. The co-compositions envisioned by Darwin are atomistic, and the “tenderness” they inspire one to contemplate is intellectual rather than affective (optic rather than haptic).²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake are all known to have been exposed to, and influenced by, Darwin’s *Zoonomia*.

²⁴⁴ “With ceaseless change, how restless atoms pass,
From life to life, a transmigrating mass;
How the same organs, which t day compose
The poisonous henbane, or the fragrant rose,
May, with tomorrow’s sun, new forms compile,
Frown in the Hero, in the Beauty smile.
Whence drew the enlighten’d Sage, the moral plan,
[That] man should ever be the friend of man;
Should eye with tenderness all living forms,
His brother-emmets, and his sister-worms.”
(*Temple of Nature, IV, 419-28*)

“The metaphysicians of Tlön do not seek for the truth or even for verisimilitude, but rather for the astounding. They judge that metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature... Amongst the doctrines of Tlön, none has merited the scandalous reception accorded to materialism...”

(Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”)

APPENDIX B: Counter-Cultural Perception

1 The 1960s as the convergence zone of two “intellectual histories”

"Where does this get us," asks Marjorie Levinson, "'us' meaning students of Wordsworth?" (388). In answer, she points to a new materialism made thinkable by work that began in the nineteen sixties, if not the turn of the twentieth century (Bergson, Peirce, James, Whitehead). Diverging slightly from Levinson, I refrain from placing new materialism(s) under the rubric of "systems theory" or "complexity" theory, a position to be clarified in due course.^{lxx} For the moment, the point is that the project of materialism seems finally able to register – more than the "irony" or "self-contradictory effects" of romantic poetry – the alternative modernity implicit in its refiguring of the "social" as the extra-human or etho-ecological.

This is not to say that Levinson repudiates new historicism or Marxist materialism. She defends historical materialism's sophisticated emphasis on critique rather than criticism – its awareness of "the necessary and immanent relationship" between theory and practice (Levinson 397) – and its deepening attention to form.^{245lxxi} She accepts the criticism that romantic

²⁴⁵ She points to "new historicism's endlessly reiterated distinction between an older ideology critique and an attempt to read 'the content of the form' ... following a Marxist Hegelian and Althusserian direction (modeled by such critics as Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, John Barrell, T. J. Clark, and John Goode)..." (397)

expressions of the etho-ecological had become illegible to new historicist accounts of “nature as a displacement of history,” and of a poem as a dynamic system of “differential relation” within “more encompassing and determinative economies of its time and place.” But she also qualifies this criticism with the argument that new historicism employed an Adornian mode of reading that never lost sight of the “alternative to history,” a “non-normative” that “poetry could and did embody or enact”:

Nature marked the site of a protest against history, but a protest conducted in a fashion overdetermined by its historical other. Romanticism could not itself “think” an effective critique of history; it could no more bring its own conditions of being under a concept than the eye can see itself seeing (or, than the ego, to the extent that it is constituted by its repressions, can perceive their operations). However, the poetry could and did embody or enact its valorization of an alternative to history - its commitment to what Jerome McGann called the “non-normative” (again, striking an Adornian note: viz, Adorno’s distinction between art and affirmative culture).

On the whole, Levinson endorses a kind of revised, transversal affect-oriented materialism, along the lines of what Brian Massumi, in proposing an “activist philosophy,” has more recently dubbed the “politics of affect,” for which to “speak of affect” is to venture “into the political dimension of relational encounter” (*Politics of Affect*). At the same time, if art implicitly involves a non-normative politics (or what Massumi calls an “aesthetico-politics” or “micropolitics”),²⁴⁶ then she argues that we are now in a position to “model, rather than simply identify, that non-normative.” Open-mindedly encouraging conversation between science and the humanities, she emphasizes emerging interdisciplinary convergences between the ecologies of materialist critical theory and of enactivism or systems theory:

²⁴⁶ In *Semblance and Event*, he writes, “The relational/participatory aspect of process could fairly be called *political*, and the qualitative/creatively-self-enjoying aspect *aesthetic*. These aspects are not treated as in contradiction or opposition, but as co-occurring dimensions of every event’s relaying of formative potential... Hyphens are in order: *aesthetico-political*, *speculative-pragmatic*.” (*Semblance and Event*, 12).

Over the last ten years, with the explosion (and convergence) of research in the physical and biological sciences - that is, with the advent (or, the filtering into general awareness) of the so-called "postclassical" sciences, and in the academy, with the emergence of such humanities research sectors as biocultural, ecological, cognitive, and environmental studies - we are for the first time able to model, rather than simply identify, that non-normative: to give it (again, echoing McGann's own borrowing) a local habitation and a name. (396-7)

Levinson implies that this model of material process²⁴⁷ (and, one might infer, this model of alternative modernity) is what historical materialism has been working towards since the sixties, when issues of counter-cultural perception and a critique of the Enlightenment model of disinterested reason came to the fore, not only in Continental critical theory but also in postclassical science. Incidentally, the sixties also saw a great spike of interest in Blake, who called for "true science" and "true art" as practices of active perception that transform society by burning up "Error or Creation" (extensive or normative perception):

"The Last Judgment is an Overwhelming of Bad Art & Science... Error or Creation will be Burned up, & then & not till Then, Truth or Eternity will appear. It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it..." (VLJ)

Counter-culture in this sense has less to do with a reaction against modernity than with an inversion of its psychological models, or with a "counter-epistemology" (West) that, for Adorno, allows suffering to speak or that, for Latour, renders visible the "middle kingdom" of "actants" or interrelations to which sensationalist psychology denies representation.^{lxxii}

In the spirit of just such an expansion of etho-ecological perception, Levinson discusses the convergence of two "intellectual histories – poststructuralist critical theory and postclassical physical, biological, and systems theory" (Levinson 374). She reads this rupture of the old models by "a paradigm of dynamic materialism that broke with all existing models" (374) as a return of

²⁴⁷ A model for which poems are intensive enactments of an alternative to history, or modernity.

the Spinozist repressed (or Deleuzian “counter-philosophy”). The sixties, she notes, saw both the integration of a Spinozist materialism into Marxism (through Althusser)²⁴⁸ and of systems theory into scientific materialism.^{lxxiii} It is not clear from her argument whether the chicken came before the egg.²⁴⁹

Another way to put this is to say that Spinoza lacked analogues with bodies of thought in any other explanatory domain. That lack persisted up until the 1960s, with the simultaneous and surely related occurrence of two intellectual upheavals - Continental critical theory and postclassical physical and biological science. Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey, Etienne Balibar, Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, and Antonio Negri (all of them mindful of Nietzsche's admiration for Spinoza) wrote monographs and essays on Spinoza, adapted his ideas, and cited him as author of "an unprecedented revolution in the history of philosophy... a revolution which was the object of a massive historical repression." To the extent that Spinoza remained impenetrable, they argued, "his work measured the opacity of the present to itself." At exactly the same time and within the same institutional and political context, the young or emerging fields of general systems theory, computational philosophy, artificial intelligence, non-linear and complexity theory, self-organization theory, and cognitive science started converging. (To my knowledge, this joint eruption of the two bodies of critical theorizing has not been investigated.) They started converging with one another, converging upon the ground traditionally occupied by philosophy of mind, metaphysics, epistemology, and ontology, and converging around a paradigm of dynamic materialism that broke with all existing models - all except Spinoza's, that is... In the work of Paul Damasio, a neurophysiologist currently working within those paradigms, the debt to Spinoza is acknowledged. (373-4)

²⁴⁸ “Ironically, Althusser's claims to have produced a Marxist science are realized now, forty years after, in theories of self-organization, emergence, complexity, autopoiesis, enactive cognition, and the like. Then again, perhaps this is not so ironic, for nearly all those areas of study were born in the 1960s, Althusser's era, and many of them within the European scientific community. *These studies of systems and life forms describe another historical materialism than the one that Marx ushered in*, one that might help us make headway on a question that has been at the heart of critical work in the humanities since the 1980s. Namely, how can the phenomena traditionally assigned to the mind (rational and unitary or self-contradictory and heterogeneous) arise without that transcendental postulate, and (here is the hard part) without anything else rushing in to fill the vacuum (such as, modes of production, drives, history).” (Levinson 398, emphasis added)

²⁴⁹ That is, whether a latent substrate of Spinozism burst back through mainstream modernity to produce new bodies of thought or whether modernity developed new bodies of thought that, in a sense, gave Spinozism a new substrate.

What is important, of course, is the effect of this new materialist perspective on Levinson's critical practice. How did it modify her previous, influential, readings of, for instance, *Tintern Abbey* in *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*?

As I have touched upon, the main shift in her approach to *Tintern Abbey* is from reading the “and” in the phrase “a motion and a spirit” as the marker of a Cartesian split between objectivity (bare matter) and subjectivity (mind) – “the gap between subject and object - in Wordsworth's idiom, the mind of man and nature” (406) – to reading this “and” as the marker of a shift between two modes of experience (one empiricist, the other Spinozist): “I would now return to the subject-object couplings that structure the poem's opening movement and work the conjunction ‘and’ along the lines of Spinoza's celebrated ‘or’” (406). Hearing this “and” differently, for Levinson, means hearing an entirely different model of body and mind, which until recently could not be registered by materialist thought.²⁵⁰ Through a rereading of a famously enigmatic Lucy poem (“A slumber did my spirit seal”), Levinson illustrates how Wordsworth performs this shift, prompting us to rethink Newtonian “motion” (or mere “force”) in terms of “spirit” – or in terms of a Spinozist capacity to be affected or modified (Massumi's relational politics of affect, or aesthetico-politics) that cannot be reduced to bare isolated matter. The upshot is that historical materialism can hear, more attentively than before, the ways in which poems are sympoieic – not forms of subjective meaning imposed on objective fact, or homogeneous figural impositions on a heterogeneous world, but as “[s]erious readers have always recognized,” a generative enactment of new perception:

Serious readers have always recognized poems as complex, autonomous, self-revising, and co-evolving systems but our grammar and vocabulary for explaining this intuition are hugely enriched by today's understanding of mind-body relations (not the least of the gains being our ability now to include history and culture in those relations). And that

²⁵⁰ Arguably, because materialist thought (as Whitehead noted) presupposed an explanatory gap between matter and mind.

understanding is itself enlarged and improved by contact with its precursor, Spinoza's philosophy." (395)

Levinson, in other words, underscores what readers appreciate in poems, their compositional intensity, which she feels is affirmed by embodied philosophy and, more recently, by embodied or contemplative science. Her Spinozist perspective has since been enhanced by Massumi's Deleuzian and Whiteheadian model of "intensity" as the "more to life" – a kind of "improvisational thinking-feeling" that is not centered in human consciousness. Massumi helps articulate an ethoecology that bridges affect, ethics, the aesthetic, the virtual, and the non-cognitive in Spinoza, Whitehead, and Deleuze & Guattari:

Intensity does not 'have' value. Intensity *is* a value, in itself. In fact, it is a surplus-value: a *surplus-value of life*. It is a more to life, in life, one with its improvisational thinking-feeling. This way of thinking about contrasts and lived intensities of feeling is unmistakably aesthetic in tenor. Whitehead was one of the first philosophers to create an *aesthetico-politics*. I find many resonances between his aesthetico-political approach and Felix Guattari's 'ethico-aesthetic paradigm', in which I find much inspiration. (*Politics of Affect*).

Again, for Levinson, this more radical or nontraditional model of affect-relations is simply part of a more attentive and thoroughgoing materialism. As she writes of *Tintern Abbey*:

Enriched by Spinoza, the poem figures thought not as a categorically hived-off mental product but as the result of a particular organization of matter and of activity, activity that is inseparable from perception... And, these composings arise as the expression of a thoroughgoing "pragmatism" (for want of a better word), one that dissolves the very premise of an anterior and/or teleological "self." (405)

2 Cognitive Ecology versus Etho-Ecology: *natura naturata* & *naturans* in Gigante's *Life*

As Levinson suggests, Francisco Varela's notion of autopoiesis (an understanding of mind-body interdependence, grounded in Spinozist models of embodiment) has been taken up by various disciplines. She also mentions Antonio Damasio, whose Spinoza-inspired theories of embodied cognition, and of the role of bodily feeling or bodily knowledge in reasoning and decision-making, made their way into early works that applied affect theory to romantic criticism (Nussbaum, Altieri, Ahmed). The challenge remains, I would argue, to wrest affect away from a systems-thinking that tends to subordinate affect to information, or to privilege mediationalism.

Increasingly, the word "ecology" is thrown into the equation, hybridized with the cultural and the cognitive. Evan Thompson has recently spoken of cognitive ecology. Psychiatrists, psychologists, anthropologists, and religious studies scholars have also begun to emphasize cultural ecology, and cultural contexts, in order to decenter the classical concept of mind. Among these ideas, I would argue, autopoiesis²⁵¹ remains the most open-ended and evocative. The current move toward a cognitive ecology (for which the context-embedded mind should be understood to exist less in the private body than in the extended body of the social world) may tend to stop shy of a thorough account of immanence. That is, much still depends on how inclusive, extended, and intensive one's notion of the social turns out to be.²⁵² Immanent naturalism is one way of venturing

²⁵¹ Particularly in its speculative feminist revision: "sympoiesis."

²⁵² Does it exclude the more-than-human? Does it include interrelations that do not depend on cognition or representation? Can the social be extended to include the etho-ecological?

toward an etho-ecological model of the social, pressing toward an alternative modernity by running *close* to pantheism or animism²⁵³ in its focus on what might be called the more-than-human ontogenesis of experience.

Here, many of the issues I have thus far discussed, particularly the question of dual vision (optics/haptics) can be clarified by a closer look at Gigante's *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism*. Observing that Shelley saw poetry as "plastic" rather than "preformed," Gigante signals how romantic views about the relative status of poetry (haptic, "ontopoietic," and "in touch" with "epigenetic" power) and prose (optic, machinic) were informed by debates in the romantic sciences of life:

What was distinctive about poetic or metaphorical language, according to Shelley, was its capacity to sprout new relations, and from these, organic forms. To be, if I can, more explicit: for Shelley narrative is essentially preformed. It can be unfolded once or many times but never re-created. Poetry, by contrast, is plastic and even ontopoietic: it is in touch with the same creative power responsible for living forms of the natural world, or the transient material shapes that power can take. Modeled on biological form, it unfolds not as a historical product but as a process, a mode of epigenesist poetics that the poem stages for future generations. (Gigante 164)

She makes the key point that the romantics would have found more-than-atomistic animism or "moreness" (219) less terrifying than mechanism: "If life conceived as power seemed too big for material containment, it was hardly as terrifying to the Romantic mindset as the opposite: the material aggregation of parts that overwhelm the animating principle" (238). Although I would question (on the grounds that it implies a perception of affect as sheer alterity) her view that the romantics saw living form as "proliferative," she hints at the intellectual context of a gothic modernity that sees matter as (un)dead:

In Kant's "Critique of Teleological Judgment" as in Blumenbach's treatise on the *Bildungstrieb*, which informed Kantian aesthetics, life tends toward monstrosity in an

²⁵³ Which, as Stengers points out, is a label ascribed to nonwestern and nonmodern views by a colonizing western world.

entelechy reaching beyond final purpose. In the end, most Romantics found the tendency toward monstrous proliferation inherent in living forms of matter preferable to the kind of monstrosity that resulted from accretion clogged bodies grown too big for their animating spirit. These were, by contrast, the horrific living dead. (220)

Helpfully, she cites Coleridge to highlight the romantic rejection of the modern bifurcation of “life” into “things with life, and things without life.” What is suggestive about Coleridge’s phrasing is the possible implication that, for the modern eye, life is most closely associated with rationality. That is, what counts as life is linked to what counts as human (male, educated, western, rational agency). Modernity, with its “glass” eyes, or centered empiricist optics, lay special claim to life, over and against an encroaching world of nonlife, which it had a duty to master and organize. Violence cannot really be committed against things that are not alive:

The attempts to explain the nature of Life, which have fallen within my knowledge, presuppose the arbitrary division of all that surrounds us into things with life, and things without life—a division grounded on a mere assumption.... that may remind us of the twin sisters in the fable of the Lamiae, with but one eye between them both, which each borrowed from the other as either happened to want it; but with this additional disadvantage, that in the present case it is after all but an eye of glass. (Coleridge, *Theory of Life*, quoted in Gigante 208)

Lucidly, Gigante provides evidence that the romantics were less idealist, and more materialist, than they are sometimes characterized. Form, as she shows, was “an emptiness, an unreality” for the romantics. By implication, when Keats writes that beauty is truth, he is not referring to beauty as ideal or formal unity, but as intensive experience of interrelationship. In Whitehead’s terminology, spatial or geometrical form is linked to abstraction/cognition (extensivity) that conceals interrelation (intensivity) – the point being that naïve realism is underwritten by organic and speculative realism. Matter in the optic mode of presentational immediacy (*natura naturata*) is underwritten by events in the haptic mode of causal efficacy (*natura naturans*):

Coleridge, in some reflections on poetry from 1818, observed that if the artist “proceeds from a Form, that answers to the notion of Beauty, namely, the many seen as one— what

an emptiness, an unreality.... The essence must be mastered— the *natura naturans*, & this presupposes a bond between Nature in this higher sense and the soul of Man” (CCW : 21). This is the starting point for *ontopoiesis*, which involves tapping into nature’s inventive genius at the subconscious level. For both Coleridge and Shelley the aesthetic equivalent of preformed life (*natura naturata*) was dead, flat, mechanical. It presupposed no bond with the genial spirit of nature but represented a pale mimesis of its apparent surfaces. Form, however, defined essentially, or as the aftereffect of power (*natura naturans*), provides an “image of life” that never dies. It is Shelley’s version of living form, manifest through symbol, his point of origin for poetic regeneration.

To replicate *natura naturans*, moreover, the artist must tap into the genial spirit of nature whose element in human beings is called soul. Working his way toward a theory of organic form, Coleridge argued that the artist must imitate “that within the thing, active thro’ Form and Figure as by symbols,” explained that this symbolic unfolding is the aesthetic embodiment of “Natur-geist... the Idea that puts the forms together... its Essence, the Universal in the Individual, Individuality itself— the Glance and the Exponent of the indwelling Power” (CCW 223). (Gigante 164-5)

What is perhaps slightly troubling in Gigante’s account of this romantic interest in “*ontopoiesis*” is the implication that, in a way that mirrors the scientist, the poet is in pursuit of the hidden vitalist principle of life.²⁵⁴ Rhetorically, however, such concerns are mitigated by Gigante’s emphasis on the poet as “tapping into” nature’s creativity. In the passage that Gigante quotes, Coleridge, borrowing from German *naturphilosophie*, does seem to veer toward idealism in linking “indwelling power” to “Natur-geist,” or to an “Idea” that is active in form. However, the more important point may be that the metaphors, symbols, and images of poetry emerge intensively from an etho-ecological mode of experience, or from an invisible “bond with the genial spirit of nature.”

²⁵⁴ See *Dejection: An Ode*.

3 Thinking “Systems” – a speculative realist/new materialist divergence

Much as I admire Levinson’s “Romancing Spinoza,” in its call for excitement about the clarity and interdisciplinarity of our intellectual moment (a modernity that seems to have transitioned through its own critical rigor into an alternative modernity), and much as I am influenced by the affective/processual model of compositionality that the essay makes accessible, I diverge from its way of thinking about system. Articulating this divergence seems all the more important, given Levinson’s observation, in another essay, “What is New Formalism” (also published in 2007), that the various new materialism(s) in circulation today have failed to acknowledge and address the diversity of their (often incompatible) epistemic assumptions.

To my ear, Levinson stops short of a constructivist, and speculative feminist, approach to aesthetic ontology, perhaps because of the relatively early moment in which the essays at issue entered this vibrant discussion. Her treatment of concepts such as immanence, cognition, and systems falls a bit more to the side of what I term “critical” rather than “speculative” materialism (anti-metaphysical or anti-essentialist rather than speculatively metaphysical or non-essentialist). This comes across in her “new formalist” optimism that enactivist perspectives provide confirmation for the reading of poems as heterocosms, and that these new “models of self-organization” will help to “advance what phenomenology began”:¹

What does this mean for us? It gives us tools, even a new framework, for thinking about poems, especially lyric poems, which on some level have always been read in structuralist-formalist fashion as minds performing what it is to be a mind in relation to a world (or, as language performing what it is to be language in relation to a world). Models of self-organization, emergent properties and so forth help us advance what phenomenology began, in studying the way that minds bring forth – enact, specify – particular environments and objects strictly on the basis of their own closure, a closure that may very well change in response to the world with which they couple.

She draws attention to the concept of “structural coupling” in order to clarify the mentality or “minimal kind of interpretation” that emerges from the autopoietic manner in which self-organizing systems maintain their coherence in dynamic interrelation with the contexts in which they are embedded:

Structural coupling has been described as a process through which a system "selects or enacts from a world of randomness a domain of distinctions that has relevance for the structure of the system . . . [W]e can say that a minimal kind of interpretation is involved, where interpretation is understood widely to mean the enactment of a domain of distinctions out of a background" (Maturana and Varela 1987, 55, 56).

While the reference here to “minimal... interpretation” resonates with Whitehead’s notion of nonconscious prehension, the reference to a “world of randomness” signals a residual epistemic commitment to atomistic (rather than radical) empiricism. Likewise, the qualification of the word “interpretation” (as “the enactment of a domain of distinctions out of a background”) has a computational quality that leaves out affect or feeling as registered by constructivists. Autopoiesis (and the enactivist model that brackets metaphysics) has come under fire from speculative feminists, whose postsecular turn is informed by multispecies studies, science studies, political ecology, and constructivist philosophy. For the postsecular turn, Whitehead has been proving more relevant than Spinoza, perhaps precisely because Whitehead rejects the idea of substance (and the consequent “subject-predicate dogma”) for the felt interrelational event. Maturana and Varela’s initial ideas might now be rethought via Haraway’s recent call for a shift from models of autopoiesis toward models of “sympoiesis.”

The most serious issue here, from a Whiteheadian perspective, is an overemphasis on cognition, which allows back in a tacit dogmatic metaphysics of the disembodied spectator. These problems are deepened by Levinson’s discussion of “enactive cognition” (in a skillful summary of what continue to be the prevailing premises of enactive cognition), which attends to the

embeddedness of embodied cognition in extra-bodily contexts, but seems to take these contexts (biology, psychology, culture) as factors that condition “sensorimotor capacities.” These, I would argue, are intellectual contexts, and though their combined influences may seem “ecological” they pertain more to an economy of information, or bioinformatics, than to affective ecology:¹

Cognition "depends on the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities" (Embodied Mind 173). These capacities are themselves embedded in more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural contexts. (The name of this process is "enactive cognition.") (Levinson 400)

Such an account opens up the wider problem that a phenomenological context, which brackets the metaphysical, treats cognition as given.

From a Whiteheadian perspective, the result is less a fidelity to lived experience than a dismissal (or “explaining away”) of metaphysical questions, one of the most pressing of those questions being, *is cognition what is actually given in experience, or is cognition a foreclosure of a more “primordial” mode of experience?* Ironically, phenomenological bracketing, in treating cognition as a given, tacitly obviates the attentive engagement in speculative metaphysics that, for Whitehead, is a vital element in the philosophical enterprise. Put differently, philosophy is thereby dismissed by science and psychology. The ontological status of cognition is left unquestioned (even if recent attempts to model enactive cognition and cognitive ecology imply an active undoing of the appearance of unity and essence in cognition). If one attends, instead, to affect as non-cognitive (or not yet cognitive) and more-than-private or extra-bodily, then (in Whitehead after *The Concept of Nature*)¹ one begins to undo the modern secular bar on metaphysical sympathies.¹ Noting the progress of systems thinking toward a “‘general science of wholeness,’ which until now was considered a vague, semi-metaphysical concept” (400), Levinson appears to treat the *metaphysical* as suspect, and to employ a materialist metaphysics that privileges computation and information over affect.

Here, I must pause to acknowledge Levinson's nimble defense of "system" against humanists whose "horror of system" derives from a weak and polemical understanding of science. She is at pains to make it clear that (both in the romantic period and today) materialism, in its links with system, has less to do with reductionism and uniformity than with immanence and complexity. She singles out Simon Jarvis as a critic who makes a travesty of romantic mechanism/organism debates:

Finally, it should be noted that Jarvis' horror of system (and thus, his attempt to rescue Wordsworth's poetry from the grip of the systematizers) derives from his reliance on a notion of system challenged in Wordsworth's own time and demolished in our own. On Jarvis' view, system is a synonym for totalizing machine - "a philosophical edifice from which [a]ll the anomalies' would have been removed" (3, cf. 27). He seems not to have noticed that Spinoza's "system of nature," now recognized as a presence in the age's marketplace of ideas, develops a materialism characterized as the unsurpassed thinking of immanence and cited as source of today's interdisciplinary research into the workings and nature of self-organizing systems. Nor does Jarvis' interest in "yesterday's unintelligibly avant-garde social science, or metaphysics and epistemology" extend to the "common sense" of today (7). Systems have been the subject of scientific and philosophical re-definition since the 1950s and prevailing wisdom now views them as models of complexity, fluidity, self-revision, and internal, diversely scaled, and self-interactive determination: in essence, the antithesis of the anomaly-eating monster conjured up by Jarvis. "When 'system' is simply shorthand for 'machine governed by a program,' it usually signals a concern with static, centralized control rather than with the sort of distributed, dynamic, contingent control under consideration here." Or, "The notion of system is no longer tied to a changing configuration of particular components or to a set of internal or external relations. Rather, a system now appears as a set of coherent, evolving, interacting processes which temporarily manifest in globally stable structures." (398)

This last definition of autopoietic systems as sets of "coherent, evolving, interacting processes which temporarily manifest in globally stable structures" accords, in important ways, with romantic models of the formative power of organic form or living form, as discussed by Gigante (who points out the ways in which, in Blake's engravings, vegetative and animal forms ceaselessly morph into human figures, and vice versa). Yet, as I will attempt to clarify, Gigante's account of the romantic "ontopoietic" model of life as that which trespasses its own forms, overemphasizes the debt of romantic poetry to 1790s materialist models of system and generation.

Gigante notes that, for the romantics, “Stasis was the ultimate form of death, and morphological profligacy (to some, perversity) provided a model for the fluid organization manifest as, and in, poetry” (Gigante 48). In this context, she undertakes an untraditional “organicist” reading of Blake. Examining Blake’s illuminated manuscripts, Gigante contends that his formal experiments need to be assessed in the context of the “interdisciplinary arena of ‘life’ in which his living aesthetic was meant to participate” (110). An “affiliat[ion] with leading figures from the scientific community,” and a likely exposure to Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoonomia* and Blumenbach’s notion of “formative power,” she proposes, are “the context for Blake’s concept of living form” (110-11). To support her argument, she looks in detail at the morphic, vegetative figures that adorn Blake’s illuminated texts. In her analysis, Blakean visual and discursive representation questions itself from within, through morphic deviations:

The delicate convergence of plant and animal life evident in the gorgeously imbricated, fluttering females on the title page indicates, in other words, that standard categories of biological organization will not suffice to comprehend Blake’s world of generation. By implication, too, all existing social and political structures that would support an axiomatic view of life are called into question. (115)

In many ways, I would argue, Gigante offers a more nuanced version of Eagleton’s argument, in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, that 1790s intellectuals, such as Erasmus Darwin, were engaged in a rethinking of biological organization that implied a rethinking of political organization. Nevertheless, though Blake (and his fellow romantics) may have avidly *read* Darwin, much of the evidence weighs toward their divergence from, rather than assimilation of, his models of generation. The objection might also be raised that Blake is never satisfied with the interconnected, even formative, universe that the the science of his day (which he saw as deistic and atheistic) already accepted. “System,” in the more fluid model that Levinson affirms, might seem even more devouring or assimilative to Blake than in its cruder iteration.

One might recall (as I will discuss in greater detail later) the ambivalence of Blake's most famed (and widely misread) use of the word "system," the declaration by Los (the imagination), as by sheer willpower he brutally drives his weeping Spectre (reason) to labor, that he must create his own system: "I must Create a System. or be enslav'd by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create" (*Jerusalem*, f. 10, ll. 21-2). As Hutchings notes, Los's relationship to his spectre is explicitly violent, suggesting that Los is forcing his systems-building faculty, reason, to use its powers in the service of imagination. However, Los will eventually relent in his compulsive efforts to master reason (lest it enslave him), instead forgiving it, or reintegrating with the Spectre (which is after all spectral because it is severed from emotion). Los's efforts at system-building, then, might be read as a Urizenic error, or an attempt to solve an issue of feeling and relation through intellectual and representational processes. System, however fluid, is less important than feeling. As a "set of coherent, evolving, interacting processes which temporarily manifest in globally stable structures," a system is still, for Blake, arguably, deanimated or shorn of speculative metaphysics.

As I will repeatedly raise this difference between critical and speculative materialism, I will refrain from beating a dead horse. The point I wish to make is that Levinson seems to moderate the implications of Spinozist affect and immanence, as discussed by Deleuze and Massumi (both of whom she cites selectively). These thinkers make few concessions to the camouflaged atomistic metaphysics of scientific materialism, insistently foregrounding instead the aesthetic ontology (or speculative metaphysics) at work in philosophers such as Spinoza and Whitehead. Levinson, admittedly, was contributing to a decade of Spinozist resurgence that ignited a decade of renewed interest in Whitehead who, more obviously than Spinoza, does not dispense with metaphysics.

4 What's at Stake: much sense and much madness

As Levinson's "Romancing Spinoza" and Gigante's *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (as well as other recent new materialist readings) suggest, romantic poetry has more to do with touch than sight, relation than knowledge, radical empiricism than idealism. *What is reshaped, above all, by these "organic realist" readings are the apparently vexed links between imagination and the body.* Imagination is understood to be less a flight from the world than a counter-actualizing (counter-epistemological, counter-cognitive) attention to the world -- or a shift from extensive to intensive attention. Bluntly, one might say that imagination undoes reified concepts (identity) in the encounter with interrelations in excess of concepts (difference). Imagination is, in this sense, *part of reason* – in "her most exalted mood" (*The Prelude*) – when by reason one means sensitive attention to reality; imagination is not split from reason but, intrinsically, part of how one reasons when the modern bar on etho-ecological experience is relaxed. Imagination is reason "inspired," or reason that responds to an "esemplastic" (Coleridge) or fluent event of etho-ecological interrelation; it is attention in the haptic rather than optic mode. That is, organic realism rethinks romantic imagination as a mode of embodied attention, for which the world is not split into sensation and reflection but flows in "pulses of emotion" (PR 163). Whether or not the romantics expressed sympathies with pantheism, their model of sympathy is nonmodern. Kevin Hutchings notes, of Blake:

The eighteenth-century animistic and panvitalistic philosophies with which Blake was familiar were largely rooted in the Greek philosophical tradition. The Stoics and Platonists, as Bishop Berkeley put it, saw life as “infused throughout all things.” And this infusion was “an inward principle, animal spirit, or natural life, producing and forming within as art doth without, regulating, moderating, and reconciling the various notions, qualities, and parts of the mundane system” (quoted in Worster 1995, 81). Although Blake explicitly voices his distaste for the philosophy of the ancient Greeks, he does not, as his patron Crabb Robinson insightfully noted (b 310), entirely reject their cosmology. In his own mythology, he adopts and adapts the organic viewpoints of panvitalism and hylozoism, for they provide him with a model of universal existence stressing the interrelationship of all entities as integral parts of a divine unified organism. As Blake writes in *The Book of Thel*, “every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself” (3:26– 7; e5). If this quotation... does not define Blakean life as such, it certainly delineates Blake’s understanding of its principal dynamic: the interconnection and interdependence of all entities. In many ways, Blake’s cosmological vision accords with Hans Jonas’s view that “life is essentially relationship; and relation as such implies ‘transcendence,’ a going-beyond-itself on the part of that which entertains the relation” (1968, 4). (Hutchings 62)

Here one may remember that political ecologists (Latour, Bennett, Stengers, Massumi) use pantheism and vitalism as *models* or analogies for a new materialist speculative realism, rather than positions they presume to inhabit. But is political ecology, or the politics of affect, romantic? Do political ecologists share a romantic understanding of imagination as a kind of haptic, etho-ecological “power” (the power to *receive* affections)?

The stakes, in romanticism, may not seem political, and yet, reconsidered through the lens of political ecology, romanticism puts into play the tension between modernity (optics) and alternative modernity (haptics).^{255lxxiv} At the center of this romantic address to an alternative modernity, I would argue, is the question of attention. More specifically, romanticism presents an

²⁵⁵ Romantic aesthetics insistently undermines Locke’s “sensation-reflection” binary. Whitehead comments, “The bifurcation theory is an attempt to exhibit natural science as an investigation of the cause of the fact of knowledge. Namely, it is an attempt to exhibit apparent nature as an effluent from the mind because of causal nature. The whole notion is partly based on *the implicit assumption that the mind can only know that which it has itself produced and retains in some sense within itself*, though it requires an exterior reason both as originating and as determining the character of its activity. But in considering knowledge we should wipe out all these spatial metaphors, such as ‘within the mind’ and ‘without the mind.’” (*Concept of Nature* 22; emphasis added)

intense example of how the political potential of art lies in its challenge to epistemic regimes that manage attention. Various recent thinkers in affect theory and radical aesthetics have made this point. In response to Eagleton's charge that the aesthetic reaffirms the fantasy of the ocular center in the face of the incursions of modern reality,²⁵⁶ they argue that the aesthetic opens the fantasy of pure reason to the haptic: "Contemplation is not the 'interpretation' that Marx decried, but precisely a mode in which philosophical interpretation is suspended. In the aesthetic, we no longer explain things away, as philosophical apologetics have so often done; instead, we are forced to feel the intolerable intensity of the actual" (Shaviro 13).

In "What's at Stake? Kantian Aesthetics, Romantic and Modern Poetics, Sociopolitical Commitment," Robert Kaufman questions the value of the aesthetic in "a world that condemns untold millions to poverty, exploitation, and oppression" (257), recalling that art, in its apparent "depoliticized" autonomy, has been said "not only to privilege imagination and self-reflexive consciousness but to let them seem virtually to eliminate external sources of determination" (260). But, he argues, (drawing on Wolfson) romantic poetry's "internal charges" are at "least protocritically imbued with sociopolitical significance."

While the Adornian arguments for romantic poetry as "immanent critique" advanced by Kaufman (and more recently by Noel Jackson) suggest the ethical and political dimension of the aesthetic as a material counter-actualization of the form and logic of dominant discourses, emerging currents in new materialism make it possible to more specifically register romanticism's

²⁵⁶ "...in this little crisis or revelatory breakdown of our cognitive routines, not *what* we know but *that* we know becomes the deepest, most delightful mystery. The aesthetic... is just the moment of letting go of the world and clinging instead to the formal act of knowing it." (Eagleton 65-6)

haptic challenge to human exceptionalist optics. What is at stake, then, is an etho-ecological attention barred by modern epistemic regimes.²⁵⁷

Haptic aesthetics (or what Isobel Armstrong calls “radical aesthetics”) helps to give the “nature” in nature poetry a different spin, making the designation “nature poet” less politically incorrect.²⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that materialist criticism can afford to overlook Wordsworth’s appropriative moves. However, it does make room for a closer sensitivity to the manner in which “nature” functions in his poetry. That said, Wordsworth might indeed be enthusiastic about the modern critical notion that there is no nature, especially in Timothy Morton’s sense that “nature” puts the radical intimacy of the ecological at a distance (with increasingly untenable, dangerous consequences). As discussed, Wordsworth and his contemporaries were actively engaged in undermining scientific naturalism or what Blake called the “NATURAL MAN” (*Laocoön*).

At heart, romantic poetry counter-acts the excision of interrelation that isolates modern individuals. Yet, modernity has commonsense on its side. After all, to an optics, what lies outside its scope, or outside its epistemic regime, looks like nonsense. Although she wrote later in the century than the British Romantics, and in New England rather than England, Emily Dickinson cut to the quick of what’s at stake:

Much madness is divinest sense

²⁵⁷ One might adopt the term “mental ecology” (Guattari, Bateson, Ivakhiv) to refer to the etho-ecological mode of “feeling intellect” (Wordsworth). By mental ecology, I gesture toward a counter-potential that undoes the epistemic foreclosures of experience. Attention, in this usage, is continuous with ecologies of affect: relation, intimacy, love. Noting the frequency with which the word love recurs in Wordsworth’s body of work, M. H. Abrams (during a more “naïve” moment in literary criticism) observed that he might be counted more a love poet than a nature poet. Etho-ecological attention bring these two terms – nature and love – closer together, in ways that would mitigate the various charges that make the stance of a nature poet suspect.

²⁵⁸ What is the problem, one might ask again, with the more commonsense notion of a nature poet, as a lover of truth and beauty? First and foremost, it seems to presume privileged access to nature, and seems to define, by default, who gets to speak for nature. It also may imply that the poet’s experience of nature ought to be universal. In brief, nature becomes the perfect canvas for politics by other means (or politics as war). Additional problems with the notion of the nature poet stem from an apparent subordination of nature to the powers of the poet’s mind.

To a discerning eye;
Much sense the starkest madness.
'T is the majority
In this, as all, prevails.

Assent, and you are sane;
Demur,—you're straightway dangerous,
And handled with a chain.

Dickinson suggests a rather violent modern situation. To the “stark madness” of modern commonsense, etho-ecological attention looks like madness. Those who “demur” (rather peacefully and intelligently, it seems) are labeled “dangerous” so that they can be forcibly constrained. In fact, extended sympathies are dangerous only to structural violence, or to epistemic regimes that constitute themselves via exclusion. As Dickinson suggests, the commonsense position is inattentive or non-discerning. It achieves its starkly “sane” allegiance to an atomistic self through a kind of psychotic rejection, or “sanitization,” of relationship.²⁵⁹ By contrast, the more “etho-ecological” experience of the world (what Bennett calls “counter-cultural perception”) does not foreclose this attention, and seems “mad” to conventional society.

“Divinest sense” may imply a finer sensitivity to the world-in-process, but it does not, arguably, imply some kind of special imaginative power reserved for a few gifted geniuses. The point of the poetry of a Dickinson or a Wordsworth is to evoke and foster this finer sensitivity, but again, not simply as sensibility, or refined sensitivity to the higher forms of art, but as etho-ecological affection. It is not religious, transcendental, or somehow beyond philosophy. Rather, it rejoins philosophy and lived experience. Indeed, the embodied element of romantic poetry fosters a less skeptical philosophy, or a “feeling intellect” that changes philosophy from within. Blake brings this home in lines from *The Laocoön*, suggesting that our mode of experience is etho-

²⁵⁹ This implicit critique of sanitizing institutions (which curb and confine sympathy) is also a theme of Blake’s most striking poems, such as “London.”

ecological, prehensive, or haptic (infused with a feeling of the whole) though our commonsense, naturalistic (finite, objectifying, scientific materialist) optics considers it “Nothing”:

All that we See is Vision
from Generated Organs gone as soon as come
Permanent in The Imagination; Considerd
as Nothing by the
NATURAL MAN
(Blake, *Laocoön*)

ⁱ Metaphysics would seem to be an elaborate means of justifying not only class privilege but western exceptionalism, providing the moral grounds for the violent invasion of nonwestern lands and cultures. Who put this supremacist ideology better than Winston Churchill, in 1937, speaking of the Palestinians?

I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place.

Widely lauded as he has been, in the west, as an indomitable war leader and prodigious orator, Churchill clearly attributes higher rationality, and greater agency, to colonizers whose linguistic and cultural origins are British. He makes a number of moves now recognized as hallmarks of western imperialism. His distorted Social Darwinism justifies imperial violence, on the grounds that “a stronger race” has a natural right to dominate “weaker” races. Presenting nonwestern people through the distorted Orientalist lens, he casts “uncivilized” people as both exotic noble savages and as unagented, irrational, and passive flies in amber – in contrast to agented and progress-oriented westerners. He also indirectly echoes John Locke’s view that non-Europeans lack property rights (and therefore cannot object when their land is seized) because only European forms of labor add value to common land, or convert it into property:

For 'tis *Labour* indeed that *puts the difference of value* on every thing; and let any one consider, what the difference is between an Acre of Land planted with Tobacco, or Sugar, sown with Wheat or Barley; and an Acre of the same Land lying in common, without any Husbandry upon it, and he will find, that the improvement of *labour makes* the far greater part of *the value*.

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, §40.

How interesting, then, that it is precisely to Locke that Whitehead turns, above all, in his critique of the fallacies of modern western thought. Whitehead argues that while Locke’s empiricism did not initially lose sight of the haptic or interrelational, it set the stage for such an erasure by overemphasizing optics, or the world abstracted and subtracted (objectified and simplified) through cognitive processes of representation.

ⁱⁱ The speculative feminist challenge to terms coined by men (autopoiesis, Anthropocene, Gaia) extends, I would argue, even to Whitehead and his doctrine of “creativity,” if it were not for the rigor and precision of his discussion of the contrast between prehension and perception. It seems a shame that he was not more familiar with Blake who, of all the romantics, is most explicitly concerned with exposing modern optics as an epistemic regime.

ⁱⁱⁱ Whitehead offers an account of the relationship of Hume to Descartes and Kant:

Hume, in effect, agrees that 'mind is a process of conrescence arising from primary data. In his account, these data are 'impressions of sensation; and in such impressions no elements other than universals are discoverable. For the philosophy of organism, the primary data are always actual entities absorbed into feeling in virtue of certain universals shared alike by the objectified actuality and the experient subject (cf. Part III). Descartes takes an intermediate position. He explains perception in Humian terms, but adds an apprehension of particular actual entities in virtue of an inspection and a 'judicium' effected by the mind (Meditations II and IJJ). Here he is paving the way for Kant, and for the degradation of the world into 'mere appearance.' (PR 49)

Later, he clarifies:

...Kant, following Hume, assumes the radical disconnection of impressions qua data; and therefore conceives his transcendental aesthetic to be the mere description of a subjective process appropriating the data by orderliness of feeling.

The philosophy of organism aspires to construct a critique of pure feeling, in the philosophical position in which Kant put his Critique of Pure Reason. This should also supersede the remaining Critiques required in the Kantian philosophy. Thus in the organic philosophy Kant's 'Transcendental Aesthetic' becomes a distorted fragment of what should have been his main topic. (PR 113)

^{iv} I believe I will have landed myself in hot water with fellow scholars who sense the ties between this study's speculative feminism to *ecofeminism*, and hence to the troubled deep-ecologist notion that, somehow, nature is feminine. Later, I will discuss the widespread objection to deep ecology as a supposedly anti-humanist ecocentrism that essentializes the more-than-human. For the moment, I will only acknowledge that etho-ecology *is* a kind of deep ecology, and does not shy away from the proposition that an ecocentric or interrelational sense of self is more natural than an egocentric one. I say that it is more natural not because I wish to lay claim to an authentic nature or a pure identity but because it seems to me that an etho-ecological sense of self arises without conceptual contrivance (i.e., “naturally,” or effortlessly), in the relaxation of the epistemic regimes that police sensitive attention. Whitehead writes, “The salvation of reality is its obstinate, irreducible matter-of-fact entities, which are limited to be no other than themselves” (SMW 136f). Deleuze writes, “Sympathy is not a vague feeling of respect or of spiritual participation: on the contrary, it is the exertion or the penetration of bodies... This is sympathy, assembling” (*Dialogues* II, 52-3).

^v The threat of the haptic to subjectivity is implicitly one of the most widely discussed questions in romantic criticism. I could point to works like Frances Ferguson's *Solitude and the Sublime*, Noel Jackson's *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry*, and Kevis Goodman's *Georgic Modernity*, which are each in their own way obsessed with the implications of the haptic in romantic poetry. Goodman notes that 18th Century science, and its new techniques of enhanced perception exposed the subject to extraordinary inundations of sense-data. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the conventional role of poetry was to shelter the British subject from the “microscopic eye” by means of the “philosophic eye,” or to moderate sensation with reflection. Hence, according to Goodman, the conventional poet was a cultural warden, taming influxes of information by calmly giving them a shape and meaning that confirmed the British social order. Goodman argues that the romantics subverted this role by embedding affective dissonance in their verse, so that the material immediacy buried in the formal ground of poetry, with its pleasant byways, continues to haunt us with its voice. In 2004, she was still among the first romanticists to bring affect into the picture, and though her treatment of affect often veers toward sensationalism, at vital moments she suggests that what's actually so disturbing to conventional British subjects about the haptic is *not* the influx of bare and inhuman information, but, precisely, an extremely uncomfortable awareness of affective interrelationships. After all, British normativity was predicated on the invisibility of the various exploited subjects to which it denied full agency – non-whites, non-males, non-citizens, and so on.

The tensions between sensationalist and relationist models of affect become a bit more explicit in Jackson's book on science and sensation. Jackson's instincts are excellent, I think, when he says that Wordsworth, despite some ambivalence, favored sensation over reflection, but it would help a great deal if Jackson also pointed out that Wordsworth was not therefore a sensationalist – or what Saree Makdisi has called a “hegemonic radical” bent on imposing the modern doctrine. Makdisi, after all, shows us that the “microscopic eye” may have seemed revolutionary in the 1790s, but was also the herald of an emerging biopolitics. What's missing, then, from the uptake of affect theory in romantic criticism is a speculative rather than critical materialist approach, to explain how Wordsworth could be on the side of sensation but not of modern sensationalism. Marjorie Levinson attempted to flesh this out in 2007, via

Spinoza, but because Spinoza remains a monist, I'd like to put Whitehead forward as a better touchstone for a relational rather than sensational theory of affect or speculative materialism.

^{vi} One of the most serious charges laid against integral ecology is that its holism, or so-called deep ecology, absorbs the individual into the collective in totalizing and fascist ways. The challenge, in both romantic poetry and integral philosophy, is to question the "individualist" limits set upon experience without producing a new dogma about what transcends the individual. A poet like Whitehead or Blake, and a philosopher like Whitehead or Deleuze, never seems to lose sight of this important fact that, at all times, one can only begin *from* individuals, or from non-repeatable (concrete yet interrelational) events of experience.

^{vii} Whitehead calls this modern view the "sensationalist" doctrine or the "epistemological theory of sense-perception" (Whitehead). Aesthetic experience is implicitly assumed to involve not "prehension" but "apprehension," a process of image-making that converts the "manifold of intuition" (Brook) into clear and distinct isolated locations: "Prior to synthesis and conceptual organization, a manifold of intuitions would be an undifferentiated unit, a seamless, buzzing confusion. Thus, to distinguish one impression from another, we must give them separate locations" (Brook). In Kant, "impressions" are "[taken] up into the activity of imagination, i.e., into the faculty of the mind that becomes conscious of images" (Brook). Not only is this notion of imagination (as an image-making faculty) narrow and instrumentalist, but it makes the imagination the agent of an optics of isolated location – arguably, it enlists the imagination in forms of experience that the romantics would have found to be forms of inadequate imagination, or to be distinctly *unimaginative*. (I therefore make frequent reference to Peter Otto's *Visionary Deconstruction*, a notable work of Blake scholarship that deals, precisely, with the question of how Blake's poetic insistently "broaches the image" - Creation, Error, the totalized world - and opens it to relationship). Such a model (in which the mind converts the haptic "manifold of raw intuition" into an optics of isolated locations) forecloses, in advance, the possibility of etho-ecological experience. "Etho-ecology" is a necessary supplement to the phrase "process-relations" because it remedies the modern tendency to reduce intensivity to processes of bare, active matter.

^{viii} On the whole, Ottum and Reno remain cautiously optimistic about the potential of affect theory to challenge bifurcative modern accounts of experience and knowledge. To an extent, this caution prevents them from distinguishing between the hegemonic modernity at work in 1790s accounts of science, education, and moral development (in "Jacobin" writers such as Darwin and Priestley) from the alternative modernity at work in romantic poetry. This caution also leads them to emphasize affect's "squishiness":

At present, "affect" remains a contested term whose relationship to sensory perception, representation, culture, and history is uncertain among literary scholars. In part, affect's "squishiness" as a critical concept reflects the genealogy of the affective turn itself: responding to social constructivism and poststructuralism as well as psychoanalysis, affect studies takes on the ambitious agenda of restoring the body/embodiment to politics, aesthetics, and ethics... Ruth Leys is among observers who accuse affect theorists of overemphasizing affect's anti-intentionality at the expense of "very difficult questions about the nature of intentionality, including the intentionality of nonhuman animals"... Nevertheless, the potential utility of putting affect theory into conversation with ecocriticism is clear: as this collection suggests, both fields stand to benefit from the encounter. (Ottum and Reno, 7)

^{ix} As critics have long noted, Coleridge (like Blake) vehemently rejected Erasmus Darwin's "atheistic" natural religion, and his conventionally ornamental philosophical poetry, along aesthetic lines that also suggest a difference along political lines. Rather than conclude (with critics like Eagleton, Bewell, and Jackson) that Darwin's materialism was too progressive for the first generation romantics, cast as increasingly conservative cultural guardians, I would argue, with Makdisi's *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*, that Coleridge and others were responding to an increasingly narrow biopolitical model of modern individualism. Marjorie Levinson's argument about the the Spinozist rather than Burkean sources of romantic aesthetics clarifies this relationship between the romantics and "anti-

aesthetic” (Eagleton, Bewell) radical 1790s intellectuals -- or “hegemonic radicals” (Makdisi) -- such as Darwin and Godwin.

At first glance, Burke’s “aesthetic” position (linking traditional sensibility to an organically evolved fabric of social feeling) and Darwin’s “anti-aesthetic” position seem like antipodes. However, both privilege reason and the rational agent. Both (from apparently opposite ends of the spectrum) emphasize a foreclosure of the body and its sensibility. Both are invested in biopolitics. Where for Burke the body is the product of tradition - and so, social mores that develop in a national British body (sympathies) ought not to be contaminated by exciting and foreign ideas or passions (enthusiasms) - for radical intellectuals like Paine, the dull social body required stimulation by animating political ideas. Like Darwin, Burke (as Frances Ferguson analyzes) is an atomist, a fact that makes it easier to understand Makdisi’s contention (in *Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*) that progress (and commerce) oriented intellectuals such as Darwin employed an assimilative and hierarchal economy of the body. Atomism, after all, implies a mastering gaze that (distanced, autonomous, immune) maintains its center in the face of disconnected and insistent matter. A Spinozist, more-than-atomistic model undermines this tacitly hegemonic optics (present in both Paineite republicanism and Burkean conservatism). As Levinson comments, “Returning to Wordsworth, to enter Spinoza's conatus under the sign of Burke is to put a reverse spin on Wordsworth's Burkean politics, switching the rotation from right to left, and to a different and more radical left than that of Paine, et al” (376-77).

^x Although I find this notion that vitalist attention to material processes was “a means to imagine human action and subjectivity” rather conservative, Dushane proposes interesting links between romantic “reverie” (ostensibly a middle term between empirical observation and meditative absorption) and Bergsonian intuition. Again, though, in ways that I believe remain consistent with Whitehead, I would emphasize that not all vitalisms are alike. Whitehead more radically challenged the doctrines of sensationalism and of materialism, critiquing vitalism as an “unsatisfactory compromise” position between materialism and idealism:

The traditional way of evading the difficulty – other than the simple way of ignoring it – is to have recourse to some form of what is now termed ‘vitalism.’ This doctrine is really a compromise. It allows a free run to mechanism throughout the whole of inanimate nature, and holds that the mechanism is partially mitigated within living bodies. I feel that this theory is an unsatisfactory compromise. The gap between living and dead matter is too vague and problematical to bear the weight of such an arbitrary assumption, which involves an essential dualism somewhere. The doctrine which I am maintaining is that the whole concept of materialism only applies to very abstract entities, the products of logical discernment. The concrete enduring entities are organisms, so that the plan of the *whole* influences the very characters of the various subordinate organisms which enter into it. (*SMW* 98).

If various constructivists (Deleuze, Braidotti, Massumi, Bennett) speak of vitalist materialism, they are careful to distinguish their affect-informed fluid vitalism from the pursuit – in the work of 1790s British intellectuals (Darwin and Priestley) – of an actual fluid power, such as electricity. That is, they avoid a dualistic vitalism that imagines a special organizing power that distinguishes living bodies from mechanistic matter. Instead, the vitalism they pursue has more to do with aesthetic ontology, or with “a life” (Deleuze) of nonconscious affect.

I would argue that constructivist writing, such as Massumi’s and Braidotti’s, sometimes carries over a residual sensationalism, perhaps as one of the hazards of hijacking scientific concepts. In Whitehead, I note an alternative, radical challenge to the “whole concept of materialism” (and of isolated location), turning instead to an ontology of organism, for which “dead matter” does not exist except as an abstraction. My gut response to Ottum and Reno is that affect studies and ecocriticism would benefit from an engagement with Whitehead, who foregrounds the romantic challenge to *natura naturata*.

^{xi} Nevertheless, Ottum and Reno offer an excellent overview of the challenge romantic studies faces, to reread romantic feeling as a complex undoing of ethical and ecological foreclosures (what Tilottama Rajan calls an “unweaving” or “desanitization” of perceptual regimes) without naively associating it with apprehension of absolute truth:

Ecocriticism has, for some time, worked to negotiate its relationship to the Romantic tradition that gave rise to nature writing and to Western environmentalism. Once focused on dismantling the Romantic ideals of nature, wilderness, the pastoral, and other concepts, today’s ecocriticism benefits from the insights of ever-more rigorous interdisciplinary inquiry and the new pathways such inquiry opens. Romantic studies now faces a similar task with respect to affect and emotions. If the affective turn is to become more than simply a return to Romantic emotions, a naïve reification of feeling as truth, then critics must continue to adopt and adapt the insights of modern science and modern affect theory into our analysis of literature and culture. This process will necessarily involve continued debate over affect’s relationship to the aesthetic, and, in turn, to the political... (8)

Here, if Ottum and Reno recite the standard critical anxiety about naïve feeling, and pay lip service to science, it strikes me that they do so in the lack of a thoroughgoing critique of the optics of isolated location, and in the lack of a fully developed model of haptic aesthetics or aesthetic ontology. Like many green critical theorists, they both avow and disavow the ontological turn. Still, they insightfully point to the potential of affect theory to lead past conventional ecological criticism and environmentalism toward the more ecosophical concerns of political ecology, in some ways a reprise of deep ecology but with a salubrious emphasis on “immanent naturalism” (Connolly) or, in Whitehead’s lighter idiom, transmissions of feeling.

^{xixii} In the twenty first century, poetry and motion may seem like two modes of a single event. But, prior to William James’s radical empiricism, at the turn of the twentieth century, organic realism may have seemed an outmoded, romantic undercurrent in western thought. A nodal point of alternative modernity, then, was James’s 1904 essay, “A World of Pure Experience,” which discusses the manner in which mediationalism “assumed a paradoxical character which all sorts of theories had to be invented to overcome”:

Representative theories put a mental “representation,” “image,” or “content” into the gap, as a sort of intermediary. Common-sense theories left the gap untouched, declaring our mind able to clear it by a self-transcending leap. Transcendentalist theories left it impossible to traverse by finite knowers, and brought an Absolute in to perform the saltatory act. All the while, in the very bosom of the finite experience, every conjunction required to make the relation intelligible is given in full. [...] Knowledge of sensible realities... comes to life inside the tissue of experience. It is *made*; and made by relations that unroll themselves in time. [...] That is all that knowing... can be known-as, that is the whole of its nature, put into experiential terms. (*Essays in Radical Empiricism*)

^{xixiii} Dickinson seems to have the opposite notion in mind in “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” which I would argue presents (like “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –”) an etho-ecological event of extra-being from the perspective of the momentarily decentered agent. The disrupted center encounters the silence in excess of thought as the terrible threat of absolute isolation or loss of identity before plunging into the interrelations hitherto curbed by knowledge:

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,

And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing – then –”

^{xiv} Quoted more fully, the passage associates the visionary imagination with a “mansion” where “shadowy things do work their changes,” suggesting that the visionary power is a zone where the modern veil between nature and culture is porous and permeable:

Visionary power
Attends upon the motions of the winds
Embodied in the mystery of words;
There darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things do work their 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 a glory scarce their own.
(*The Prelude*, 1805, Book Five, 611-633)

Visionary power, in this sense, is a sensitivity to visitational powers that approach the centered subject – powers that have been evacuated from modern experience. In the Spinozist sense, these powers are affections that increase the capacity of the body to be affected by other bodies. (In Deleuze's reading, Spinoza defined imagination precisely as this process-relational mode of affection, in excess of commonsense – that is, in excess of conventional experience of the world in terms of objects rather than interrelations). Poets are “mighty” in this sense because of the strength of their ability to receive such counter-epistemological affections into the intricate turnings of verse. But readers are mighty, too, in that they too receive these powers, recognizing the world “in flashes” of the more-than-modern. “Power,” in Spinoza's lexicon, has less to do with domination or the power to control or confine, than with the power to move, or to be moved by more intense apprehensions of active interrelations rather than isolate substances. In a word, the might of poets, and readers, is relation.

^{xv} Passing from the subject of nature to that of books, he both celebrates them as the “adamantine holds” that contain “all the meditations of mankind” built up by passion “which itself / Is highest reason in a soul sublime,” and yet laments that they are in fact *not* adamant. In the context of a fantasy of planetary apocalypse, in evocation of his confidence that the “living presence” will “still subsist / Victorious,” and that “composure would ensue, / And kindlings like the morning,” he points out that books will vanish, and asks why the “mind” lacks an “element to stamp her image on / In nature somewhat nearer to her own?” Here, the imagination is figured as a kind of feminine spirit that the mind can “send abroad” into the frail “shrines” of books:

‘Should earth by inward throes be wrenched throughout,
Or fire be sent from far to wither all
Her pleasant habitations, and dry up
Old Ocean in his bed, left singed and bare,
Yet would the living presence still subsist
Victorious; and composure would ensue,
And kindlings like the morning—presage sure, 35
Though slow perhaps, of a returning day.’
But all the meditations of mankind,
Yea, all the adamant holds of truth

By reason built, or passion (which itself
Is highest reason in a soul sublime), 40
The consecrated works of bard and sage,
Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,
Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes—
Where would they be? Oh, why hath not the mind
Some element to stamp her image on
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?

^{xvi} At the same time, he valorizes imagination in the more conventional sense of an inheritance of wider freedom or sympathetic power, linking it to tales of romance and legend, or to the dreams of childhood, making the following prayer for children: “May books and Nature be their early joy, / And knowledge, rightly honored with that name— / Knowledge not purchased with the loss of power!” (448-450). Growing wistful, he describes how that which works invisibly and intensively in the world works in the heart, moving people who have no selfish motives or goals to produce “works of love,” or charming tales for which the imagination will always have an appetite:

A gracious spirit o’er this earth presides,
And o’er the heart of man: invisibly
It comes, directing those to works of love
Who care not, know not, think not, what they do.
The tales that charm away the wakeful night
In Araby—romances, legends penned
For solace by the light of monkish lamps;
Fictions, for ladies of their love, devised
By youthful squires; adventures endless, spun
By the dismantled warrior in old age
Out of the bowels of those very thoughts
In which his youth did first extravagate—
These spread like day, and something in the shape
Of these will live till man shall be no more.
Dumb yearnings, hidden appetites, are ours,
And they must have their food...

Comparing imagination to the “throne” on which childhood sits, he extols its power, and figures those “dreamers” who compose tales of fantasy, “forgers of lawless tales,” as the “friends” who help us to “endure this state of meagre vassalage”:

...Our childhood sits,
Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne
That hath more power than all the elements.
I guess not what this tells of being past,
Nor what it augurs of the life to come,
But so it is, and in that dubious hour,
That twilight when we first begin to see
This dawning earth, to recognise, expect—
And in the long probation that ensues,
The time of trial ere we learn to live
In reconciliation with our stinted powers,
To endure this state of meagre vassalage,

Unwilling to forego, confess, submit,
Uneasy and unsettled, yoke-fellows
To custom, mettlesome and not yet tamed
And humbled down—oh, then we feel, we feel,
We know, when we have friends. Ye dreamers, then,
Forgers of lawless tales, we bless you then—
Impostors, drivellers, dotards, as the ape
Philosophy will call you—then we feel
With what, and how great might ye are in league,
Who make our wish our power, our thought a deed,
An empire, a possession. Ye whom time
And seasons serve—all faculties—to whom
Earth crouches, th' elements are potter's clay,
Space like a heaven filled up with northern lights,
Here, nowhere, there, and everywhere at once.

And yet, as Book Five nears its end, he turns away from childhood and its “cravings for the marvelous” toward “earth and human life,” a grounding in “sober” sympathy that “might demand a more impassioned strain.” Even as he affirms this increasing “love” for things as they are, he laments the loss of “raptures now for ever flown.” He recounts how even as “words themselves” began to move him “with conscious pleasure,” poems that once delighted him now stood “[d]ead in my eyes as is a theatre / Fresh emptied of spectators”:

It might demand a more impassioned strain
To tell of later pleasures linked to these,
A tract of the same isthmus which we cross
In progress from our native continent
To earth and human life—I mean to speak
Of that delightful time of growing youth
When cravings for the marvellous relent,
And we begin to love what we have seen;
And sober truth, experience, sympathy,
Take stronger hold of us; and words themselves
Move us with conscious pleasure.

I am sad

At thought of raptures now for ever flown,
Even unto tears I sometimes could be sad
To think of, to read over, many a page—
Poems withal of name—which at that time
Did never fail to entrance me, and are now
Dead in my eyes as is a theatre
Fresh emptied of spectators. Thirteen years,
Or haply less, I might have seen when first
My ears began to open to the charm
Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet
For their own sakes—a passion and a power—
And phrases pleased me, chosen for delight,
For pomp, or love.

Here, Wordsworth suggests a connection between the consciousness of words, for their own sake, and of the sober facts of the world: a kind of entry into a world of reference that is also a world of finitude. He

pictures himself, at the age of thirteen, as crossing from the "native continent" of imagination to a more prosaic mode of experience.

xvii I looked and looked, self-questioned what this freight
Which the new-comer carried through the waste
Could mean, the Arab told me that the stone
(To give it in the language of the dream)
Was "Euclid's Elements," and "This," said he,
"Is something of more worth;" and at the word
Stretched forth the shell, so beautiful in shape,
In colour so resplendent, with command
That I should hold it to my ear. I did so,
And heard that instant in an unknown tongue,
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
A loud prophetic blast of harmony;
An Ode, in passion uttered, which foretold
Destruction to the children of the earth
By deluge, now at hand. No sooner ceased
The song, than the Arab with calm look declared
That all would come to pass of which the voice
Had given forewarning, and that he himself
Was going then to bury those two books:
The one that held acquaintance with the stars,
And wedded soul to soul in purest bond
Of reason, undisturbed by space or time;
The other that was a god, yea many gods,
Had voices more than all the winds, with power
To exhilarate the spirit, and to soothe,
Through every clime, the heart of human kind.

"It is," said he, "the waters of the deep
Gathering upon us;" quickening then the pace
Of the unwieldy creature he bestrode,
He left me: I called after him aloud;
He heeded not; but, with his twofold charge
Still in his grasp, before me, full in view,
Went hurrying o'er the illimitable waste,
With the fleet waters of a drowning world
In chase of him; whereat I waked in terror,
And saw the sea before me, and the book,
In which I had been reading, at my side.

Full often, taking from the world of sleep
This Arab phantom, which I thus beheld,
This semi-Quixote, I to him have given
A substance, fancied him a living man,
A gentle dweller in the desert, crazed
By love and feeling, and internal thought
Protracted among endless solitudes;
Have shaped him wandering upon this quest!
Nor have I pitied him; but rather felt

Reverence was due to a being thus employed;
And thought that, in the blind and awful lair
Of such a madness, reason did lie couched.
Enow there are on earth to take in charge
Their wives, their children, and their virgin loves,
Or whatsoever else the heart holds dear;
Enow to stir for these; yea, will I say...
Of an event so dire, by signs in earth
Or heaven made manifest, that I could share
That maniac's fond anxiety, and go
Upon like errand. Oftentimes at least
Me hath such strong entrancement overcome,
When I have held a volume in my hand,
Poor earthly casket of immortal verse,
Shakespeare, or Milton, labourers divine!
(84-165)

^{xviii}I would like to paint, in broad brushstrokes, the problem that we run across as romanticists. Namely, we suffer from the habit of reading the haptic through an optic lens. This is what makes it difficult to see that, after 1800, Wordsworth's real resistance was not to radical intellectuals but to the modern doctrine and its biopolitics. Wordsworth was on the side of sensation, but as it was understood prior to modern secularism. Coming back, then, to my core thesis: we need to register more-than-modern sympathy as the bracketed middle term between sensation and reflection. Romantic poetry asks us to unleash those sympathies and unfreeze our feelings, fostering what Whitehead calls world loyalty, or what Wordsworth, addressing Coleridge in the final lines of *The Prelude*, calls "firmer trust":

Blessed with true happiness if we may be
United helpers forward of a day
Of firmer trust...
Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason and by truth; what we have loved
Others will love...
(13.437-445)

I suspect that firmer trust is necessary if we are, as the speculative feminist Donna Haraway recently put it in *Staying with the Trouble*, to find "other ways to reworld, reimagine, relive, and reconnect with each other, in multispecies well-being."

"Etho-ecology" in this sense trespasses what Whitehead called the "phenomenal veil" (PR 142) tacitly imputed by modern thought – a bifurcation of subjective experience and reality that, Whitehead suggests, "pervades modern philosophy" (142). Whitehead's sustained critique of the "modern doctrine" raises a crucial question. What if Adam Smith's "private psychology" narrowly redefines sympathy precisely to narrow our sympathies? One might call this sensationalist psychology truly empiricist because it sticks with sensation, but Whitehead showed, in the 1920s, that orthodox empiricism, and its model of sensation, is in fact not concrete but abstract. In contrast to radical empiricism, it heroically explains away interrelations in order to isolate objects. If radical empiricism is haptic, empiricism is optic. One belongs, in Whitehead's idiom, to the speculative school, the other to the critical school.

That said, having ejected etho-ecological interrelations from view, our most inspired idea as modern critical theorists seems to be radical alterity, endorsed, for instance, by a third-wave eco-critic as influential as Timothy Morton. But radical alterity, from a radical empiricist perspective, does not look

very inspired at all. I can illustrate this by linking radical alterity to the spectral optics of gothic romanticism. Certain elements in Coleridge's poetry seem to lead to what has come to be called dark or gothic romanticism. At its heart, the gothic expresses a modern horror at the psychological implications of orthodox empiricism, or what Goodman has called the "fantasy-nightmare" of the "microscopic eye." Gothic horror, still one of our most popular genres, perceives our interment in a universe of death, or an undead universe of life-in-death. All the romantics – notably Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Keats, not to mention Percy and Mary Shelley – wrote of this specter of life-in-death, in terms of the psychological consequence of modernity, or the experiential consequence of private psychology. So, one could say that the romantics offer an alternative to gothic psychology, or modern spectral optics.

In many ways, anti-essentialist and anti-humanist scholasticism continues to impose a critical optics upon the speculative. Romanticists tend to reduce affect to bare, inhuman sensation - or information - or radical alterity. To avoid this kind of single vision, and maintain a Blakean four-fold – or at least two-fold – vision, which sees that affect is not only conditioning but also deconditioning, not only material but interrelational, is difficult, and perhaps professionalism discourages it.

^{xix} If this is indeed only a deferral, then what, one might ask, does Wordsworth identify as a prerequisite to such an eventual fulfillment? Though Wordsworth is rather vague on this point, he implies a radical aesthetic model of the relationships among affect, body, knowledge, and world. Science, as of yet, has created no "material revolution" in "our condition." As if to clarify what he means by "condition," he writes, "in the impressions which we habitually receive." In other words, he implies that we will have to wait until science changes the constitution or condition of our bodies, or the very nature of our sense impressions, before science can be said to be part of human consciousness. One could read this, heretically perhaps, to imply that science will eventually arrive at a philosophical understanding that does not insult the living values of poets, but that, like poetry, understands mentality as a modifying agency. Eventually, he implies, science may affect us intensively and not merely extensively, in ways that intensify the aesthetic and affective dimensions of experience. That is, dispensing with what Whitehead calls the "doctrine of secondary qualities," Wordsworth defers a poetry of science to a futurity in which the atomistic "objects" of science become open to "sensation" and "familiar" to us, or when its "relations" will "be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings":

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, but 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. 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; emphasis added)

Fascinatingly, Wordsworth asserts that "what is now called Science" may one day go by another name (poetry?), when and if it puts on "a form of flesh and blood." Until then, he implies, science and its objects cannot yet be called "a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man":

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. (PLB)

I tarry here with this slightly vague passage from a poetic manifesto written in 1800 chiefly because of the irony it may now take on for us. Science seems closer than ever to putting on “a form of flesh a blood” and of effecting a “material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive.” Yet, arguably, this is less because science has become more human than because it has pressed the human ever further toward the machine.

^{xx} Morton, who works from the Hegelian tradition, might be considered a successor of Heidegger (as his increasing connection with Harman’s object-oriented ontology suggests). His views tend to hinge more on issues of representation or information (and hence on a tacit assumption of what Whitehead calls “mind in the background”) than on issues of intuitive value or feeling. Here one might remember that for Whitehead (as for Deleuze) consciousness or cognition is not necessary for experience, which implies that information and representation are not the primary modes of movement or relationship in the universe. What is primary, instead, for constructivists (and Morton has long been in debate with Shaviro over these issues) is an affective and aesthetic (speculative) metaphysics of interrelationship rather than an informational and “factual” (critical) metaphysics of independent existence.

^{xx} Again, then, the heart of the romantic (and, perhaps, the deep ecological) challenge to modern epistemic regimes is precisely this questioning of the logic that permeates secular thought: (1) the facts of the world are physical and therefore *not* metaphysical (2) consciousness is a kind of clear optics that perceives physical facts (3) consciousness can penetrate the deceptions of the senses with regard to the physical, approaching ever closer to the bare facts (shorn of cultural fantasies), and (4) the only role of consciousness, then, is to precisely penetrate to the facts of physical reality. What secularism denies, in short, is that consciousness may simply be a centered representational mode, which is not necessary to experience itself, and that experience (as a lived and embodied event) belies at every turn the modern (metaphysical) belief that there is no metaphysics, or the modern faith in isolated existence.

^{xxi} Whitehead is at pains to clarify that his “organic” philosophy makes no recourse to the notion of mind *because* of its fidelity to reality. He overturns the “overintellectualist bias” that “emotional feelings are necessarily derivative from sensations,” precisely because, he argues, sensations imply “perception” rather than “reception.” At the heart of his contrast between the modern doctrine or sensationalist mythology and “organic realism” is the notion that experience involves, initially, emotional prehension rather than sensation:

Human and Locke, with the overintellectualist bias prevalent among philosophers, assume that emotional feelings are necessarily derivative from sensations. This is conspicuously not the case; the correlation between such feelings and sensations is on the whole a secondary effect... The confinement of our prehension of other actual entities to the mediation of private sensations is pure myth. The converse doctrine is nearer the truth: the more primitive mode of objectification is via emotional tone.... We prehend other actual entities more primitively by direct mediation of emotional tone, and only secondarily and waveringly by direct mediation of sense... One difficulty in appealing to modern psychology, for the purpose of a preliminary survey of the nature of experience, is that so much of that science is based upon the presupposition of the sensationalist mythology. Thus the simpler, more naive surveys of Locke and Hume are philosophically more useful. (PR 141)

This view is further clarified by his discussion of Cartesian “substance-quality” or mind-body metaphysics:

Descartes' notion of an unessential experience of the external world is entirely alien to the organic philosophy. This is the root point of divergence; and is the reason why the organic philosophy has to abandon any approach to the substance-quality notion of actuality. The organic philosophy interprets experience as meaning the 'self-enjoyment of being one among many, and of being one arising out of the composition of many.' Descartes interprets experience as meaning 'self-enjoyment, by an individual substance, of its qualification by ideas.' (145)

^{xxii} In many ways, the trajectory of my argument is circular rather than linear. I will seem to argue that speculative materialists (twenty-first-century sociologists of science, political ecologists, and embodied philosophers) go back to the radical empiricism and process philosophy exemplified in Whitehead, who in turn goes back to the Romantics, for their etho-ecological attitudes, or for a nonmodern notion of *natura naturans* that, even for the Romantics, was more an object of nostalgia than a tenable perspective. One may be tempted, also, to trace this perennial integral ecology *ad infinitum*, or at least through a tangled skein, to the German Romantics - for instance, the influence of Schelling on Coleridge - to Spinoza, to Jakob Boehme and medieval mystics, to Greek thinkers (Neoplatonists, Gnostics, Presocratics). In that sense, speculative materialism would simply be the most updated postsecular version of a nonmodern integral perspective that may continue to provoke labels such as mystic or romantic. But what if this perspective is urgently concerned not with the “spiritual” but an embodied reality of interrelation that we ignore to our peril? And what if, as Latour famously argued in the early 1990s, “we have never been modern?”

^{xxiii} One might object that this romantic humanization of the natural universe (this “egotistical sublime”) implies the imposition of human fantasies on a nonhuman or more-than-human universe. Such fantasies, including ecological fantasies (as Žižek insists), are not natural but political. In “Necropolitics,” Braidotti offers a speculative feminist alternative to this skeptical modernist stance. She explains that the trend among male western intellectuals, at least in modernist and postmodernist critical theory, has been to insist that we confront the radical alterity of the natural universe, refraining from imposing fables or aesthetic narratives upon this alterity. In reply, she argues, like Donna Haraway, for the value of fabulations, or new ways of “reworlding” and “reimagining” in “multispecies well-being” (Haraway). Braidotti proposes that our contemporary awareness of biomediation, instead of increasing our cynicism about subjectivity, may increase the visibility of “a Life” (Deleuze) in excess of metaphysical circumscriptions. She sees twenty-first century hyper-awareness of the vitality and transversality of life as the basis for an ethics of sustainability: “The process of confronting the thinkability of a Life that may not have »me« or any »human« at the centre is actually a sobering and instructive process. I see this post-anthropocentric shift as the start for an ethics of sustainability that aims at shifting the focus towards the positivity of *zoe*” (*Necropolitics*).

I would add that postmodern respect for alterity is not a new attitude, but is built into scientific materialism itself. The necropolitics that Braidotti finds in modern critical thought, Blake saw in scientific materialism, which he cast as a cult of life-in-death and a suppression of fluent life. A refusal to deanimate or dehumanize is, in this sense, as suggested by Stengers in “Reclaiming Animism,” a refusal to privilege abstract atoms, conceived as bare and serial particles, over lived or concrete contexts. In his ongoing critique of both orthodox empiricism and scientific materialism, Whitehead explicitly critiqued this deanimation of nature: “*This... grand doctrine of Nature as a self-sufficient, meaningless complex of facts.... is the doctrine which in these lectures I am denying*” (*MT*, Lecture 7: Nature Lifeless).

^{xxiv} Stengers is, of course, not presenting herself as an animist. Rather, she is pushing forward a post-secular thought that implies a kind of Guattarian etho-aesthetics, though Stengers should be understood to push Guattari’s model of autopoiesis toward “sympoiesis” (Haraway). Simon O’Sullivan offers a Guattarian account, drawn from *Chaosmosis*, of how the “third Assemblage” or third paradigm in which we currently live does not represent a “return” to the “first Assemblage” of animism (“pre-individual subjectivity composed of a-personal strata”) but “to a different type of re-enchantment of the expressive modalities of subjectivity, in which “[d]ifference, or alterity, is... cohered together rather than dispersed:

The above two Assemblages cannot be reduced to specific epochs for they can, and invariably do, co-exist within the same period (for example, animist beliefs and practices co-exist with advanced capitalism in the hyper-modern culture of Japan). Likewise, the third Assemblage is present within our own—although only in an embryonic state. It bears some relation to the first, but crucially does not involve a simple return (if this were ever a real possibility), but, we might say,

a return that is itself coloured by its passage through the second Assemblage. Certainly, the third Assemblage, the aesthetic paradigm proper, has in common with the first that the interiority of atomized individuated subjects is exploded and that a multiplicity of different regimes and practices are implicated. However the difference – between first and third – is important. As Guattari remarks:

"One does not fall back from the regime of reductionist transcendence onto the reterritorialisation of the movement of infinity in finite modes. The general (and relative) aestheticisation of the diverse Universes of value leads to a different type of re-enchantment of the expressive modalities of subjectivity. Magic, mystery and the demonic will no longer emanate, as before, from the same totemic aura. Existential Territories become diversified, heterogenised."

This affirmation of difference is then not animist in the sense of the first paradigm. It is not, we might say, a return to a pre-individual subjectivity composed of a-personal strata. For, as Guattari goes on to say: 'The decisive threshold constituting this new aesthetic paradigm lies in the aptitude of these processes of creation to auto-affirm themselves as existential nuclei, autopoietic machines'. Difference, or alterity, is then cohered together rather than dispersed as in the first Assemblage... how this existential 'stickiness' takes place... involves the invention of 'mutant coordinates'. Indeed, ultimately, it is art's capacity to engender 'unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being' through the invention of such different coordinates that gives it a privileged place within the third Assemblage. (O'Sullivan 261)

^{xxv} This puts me in mind, in ways that I hope will not disorient the reader, of Donna Haraway's recent discussion in *e-flux* journal of the fact that this modern mode of epistemologically isolated individualism or Smithian mode of political economics, to which interrelation has been unthinkable, has now itself become unthinkable, thanks to the increasing visibility of "symbiogenesis and sympoietics." Cheekily, in "Tentacular Thinking," she challenges outmoded terms like autopoiesis, the humanities, and even (the apparently radical new term) Anthropocene, with less colonizing terms such as sympoiesis, the humusities, and the Chthulucene. As she puts it, "The myth system associated with the Anthropos is a setup, and the stories end badly. More to the point, they end in double death; they are not about ongoingness. It is hard to tell a good story with such a bad actor. Bad actors need a story, but not the whole story." She makes what seems to me the very Blakean point that "It matters which thoughts think thoughts":

What happens when human exceptionalism and the utilitarian individualism of classical political economics become unthinkable in the best sciences across the disciplines and interdisciplines? Seriously unthinkable: not available to think with. Why is it that the epochal name of the Anthropos imposed itself at just the time when understandings and knowledge practices about and within symbiogenesis and sympoietics are wildly and wonderfully available and generative in all the humusities, including noncolonizing arts, sciences, and politics? What if the doleful doings of the Anthropocene and the unworldings of the Capitalocene are the last gasps of the sky gods, not guarantors of the finished future, game over? It matters which thoughts think thoughts.

We must think!

^{xxvi} Constructivists have been registering the ways in which global warming has come to exhibit, like feeling in nineteenth century British poetry, a kind of personification. Such personification, as Adela Pinch has argued, involves more than a trope that quaintly anthropomorphizes nature, but an uncanny sense of the "extravagance" of "vagrant" passions that do not so much belong to persons as travel across them. Pinch suggests, in other words, that the inhabitants of the early nineteenth century may have been more open to a nonmodern awareness of the "delicate networks traced by Ariadne's little hand" (Latour, WHNBM, 4) than we moderns, for whom these webs remain "invisible."

^{xxvii} If the virtual is now widely associated with affective-aesthetic experience, it nevertheless seems an impersonal term that flattens subjectivity to the vanishing point. Yet, certainly, as Deleuze takes up the term from Bergson, the virtual implies more-than-interior affect. Yoking Spinoza to Bergson, Deleuze (like James) links “purely transitive” affect with “lived duration.” For Spinoza, he explains, affect “is not confined to the image or idea; it is of another nature, being purely transitive, and not indicative or representative, since it is experienced in a lived duration that involves the difference between two states” (SPP 49). Affects are not only modes, but “that which happens to the mode, the modifications of the mode, the effects of other modes on it” (48):

...from one state to another, from one image or idea to another, there are transitions, passages that are experienced, durations through which we pass to a greater or a lesser perfection. Furthermore, these states, these affections, images or ideas are not separable from the duration that attaches them to the preceding state and makes them tend toward the next state. These *continual durations* or variations of perfection are called ‘affects,’ or feelings (affectus). (SPP 48-9; emphasis added)

In works such as *Parables for the Virtual* and *Semblance and Event*, Massumi has likewise explored a Bergsonian-Deleuzian-Whiteheadian aesthetic ontology, in the context of which the term “virtual” is far more organic than machinic. The problem I am attempting to point out lies mainly with the uptake of these emerging models of virtual ecology in literary criticism, where the term virtual may seem more rigorous and anti-essentialist than a term like integral, precisely because it can be taken up by mediationalist thought. The challenge is to remember that, for thinkers of aesthetic ontology, the virtual is affective, and affect involves not mediation but touch.

^{xxviii} As Erin Manning and Brian Massumi describe them, events involve a Spinozist ethics – a “politics-in-germ,” “ecology of relations,” or “politics of life” – that hinges on receptive attention: “Events carry as their preindividual share a receptiveness to the dance of attention... The politics-in-germ of event-time is their ethics.” Escaping the logic of late Capitalism, they imply, depends on a movement of attention that flows into a debarred etho-ecological intensity: “remaining attentive to something akin to Deleuze’s a *life*, the preindividual force of life that accompanies all modalities of existence” (Manning).

^{xxix} This commitment to the lived etho-ecological event over and above consciousness, bridges, I would suggest, not only constructivism and romantic poetry (or philosophy and art) but various attention-oriented modalities (religion, science, and more). That is, attention is emerging as a transdisciplinary and transversal question. Fusing movement-based practices with speculative materialist philosophy, in a verbally inventive mode of aesthetic meditation, for instance, Erin Manning comes at this question of what it means to restore to visibility the “incipient tendencies” of this “dance of attention”:

A dance of attention springs from the attentiveness of a diagrammatic praxis within co-constitutive spacetimes of experience. This is not an attentiveness in and of the human body, though the body can certainly be one of its intensive features. The dance of attention is a co-compositional force of diagrams for the moving that emerges in the work’s performances. It is the difference and repetition of performance’s ontogenetic field as it creates space.

Another way to talk about the practices through which incipient tendencies express themselves is to differentiate between modes of existence. Modes of existence, for Etienne Souriau and Gilbert Simondon, refer to modes of invention that act on the present, altering experience in the making. Experience in the making is always on the threshold. The threshold marks the opportunity for discontinuous potentialities to mix. As they come together – the diagram and movement, say – what happens is disparity: they collide in an emergent discontinuity. This emergent discontinuity becomes a continuity only to the extent that a third is introduced: relational movement. This third brings about another plane of operation.

Melding post-Newtonian physics, process-relations, and “meditative aesthetics” (James Williams), in ways that resonate with models of autopoiesis and embodied attention in contemplative science, Manning articulates a model of “inflexion” based on “qualitative variations in emphasis,” a “dance of attention... spurred by the capacity to tap into the incipient potential of a set of emergent relations.” It is as if the partition between human and universe, potentials of interrelation and laws of physics, dissolves. An “elasticity of the nodes of intensity,” she proposes, “...bends spacetime to make space for points of inflexion that, in turn, create differentials of relation.” Drawing on Simondon, in ways that recall Whitehead’s emphasis of the compositional flow of feeling or sympathy in the extensive continuum, she comments that “tapping into a compositional matrix of relational movement depends on the capacity of spacetimes of emergence to fold through what Simondon calls the ‘operative solidarity’ of the elements in co-composition.”

This leads Manning in to a Deleuzian discussion of the politics of the “more-than human,” grounded, like Spinozist ethics, less in individuals than in transversal incipencies, pre-individual intensities, or an “infra-individuating force”:

Deleuze's A life is a challenge to individualized politics. A life foregrounds the force of life – its political potential as an infra-individuating force for a diagrammatic praxis of life-living – at the cusp of individuation where the pre-individual is active in all its intensity. A life is power across life, not biopolitical power over life. It is the event of life living as it emerges on the transindividual threshold of collective individuation. Not of the human per se, not in this or that body, A life is across, with. A life "is precisely what has been stripped of everything that could contain it or represent it" (Palbart 2009: 41)... It is the affective force for the incipient dephasing of individualization...

^{xxx} To address the modern association of the aesthetic and the cognitive, it would be impossible to ignore the influence of Kant, who made the epistemological model of sense perception, only tacit in empiricism, explicit. I have touched upon Whitehead’s view that “Kant’s act of experience is essentially knowledge” (PR 155), but I would like to spell out what that means for Kant’s model of *imagination*.

If imagination plays a key role in the Kantian association between aesthetic experience and representation, it does so (as Rei Terada explores in *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction*) in ways the romantics might rue. In Kant, imagination mediates between intuition and judgment. In the Kantian sense, imagination is mere image-making; it makes images out of intuitions, which are themselves “theoretical” abstractions from impressions, or the conversion of the manifold into isolated locations. Imagination, then, is “a blind but indispensable function of the soul” (A78-B103), that “has to bring the manifold of intuitions into the form of an image” (A120). In turn, the images produced by imagination have to be ordered by concepts. Ultimately, in describing these syntheses, Kant makes a ninety-degree turn (Brooke), characterizing the process of perception in terms of “transcendental apperception,” and postulating the metaphysical pre-existence of unitary consciousness.

(This recourse to dogmatic metaphysics is notable in Kant’s view of the sublime. An etho-ecological account of the sublime might be that the bar on etho-ecological attention suddenly drops when thought or cognition falls silent in the face of immense objects/events. The Kantian account is that the sheer scale of the object exceeds the capacity of imaginative processes of representation. The mind catches itself in the act of representing reality to itself. This might be profoundly disorienting. All at once, one might see that what one has taken for naive and natural perception is in fact representational. For Kant, though, when the ground of imagination falls out from under one, a different ground appears. One’s mind does not simply go blank. Instead, one continues to enjoy unitary and continuous experience, thanks to a priori mathematical processes of cognition, which might be said to constitute the mind’s real form. In brief, one encounters not the sublimity of imagination/feeling but of higher reason/judgment).

What I would highlight is less the vagueness of Kant's account of the transcendental ground of consciousness than the fact that his traditional account of imagination is almost the antithesis of Wordsworth's: "Imagination – here the Power so called / Through sad incompetence of human speech, / That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss..." (P.6.592-4). In romantic poetry, imagination is not image-making, but, on the contrary, more closely akin to Spinozist image-affection: it has less to do with the perception of isolated location than with the undoing of static perceptual regimes by more-than-human affections, or by "powers" (modal presences, vibratory vectors of emotion) rather than "objects."

Romantic imagination registers *natura naturans* in ways proscribed by Kantian cognition, with its privileging of centered consciousness. One of the signature counter-epistemological moves of British Romantic poetry is to restore to modern visibility "...another nature... purely transitive, and not indicative or representative... experienced in a lived duration..." (SPP 49). In romantic poetry, as in radical empiricist or process philosophy, the aesthetic is affective rather than "representative," offering a non-mediationalist bridge between imagination and body.

^{xxx1} Through "participative meditation" (Williams), Massumi disrupts the classical empiricist sensation-reflection divide with the middle term of sympathy. In doing so, he also disrupts the divide between art and philosophy. As (the apparently pseudonymous) James Williams writes, of Massumi's *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*:

Massumi invites us into an aesthetic meditation that is also a meditation on art.... *Semblance and Event*... is a beautifully written piece with complex rhythms interweaving philosophy, aesthetics, science and art-practice.... Meditation calls for commentary. It also inspires. Sometimes, it meets with violent opposition.... As pictured in Isabelle Stengers's generous blurb, Massumi's prose achieves 'indiscernibility' between disciplines and experiences. It is 'participative' rather than critical. It does not introduce a set of thinkers, nor put their thought in academic context. Philosophies instead become part of hybrid acts. They become part of the action. This action is a participative meditation across art, science and philosophy.... Partly because of the way it stretches the meditative form, Massumi's thought demands interpretation.... He is reflecting on process philosophy of art, where art and philosophy become a joint activity through shared occurrence, or joint event-hood. Philosophy thereby loses its abstraction and external critical viewpoint. It gains a more direct involvement in artistic creation and sensibility. This activity is underpinned conceptually by a shift from objects to events...

Blake presents a robust example of precisely this kind of "shared occurrence" of art and philosophy, or this "direct involvement" of philosophy in "artistic creation." Indeed, Blake's insistence on vision and imagination is aptly described in the very terms with which Williams describes Massumi's meditative mode of "thought in the act": as an activity "underpinned conceptually by a shift from objects to events."^{xxxii} In recent speculative feminist writing (Haraway, Stengers, Braidotti), there is, arguably, less of an emphasis on arriving at a "secular Gaia" (Latour) than on challenging sensationalism in Whiteheadian ways (pressing autopoiesis toward sympoiesis, anthropocene toward chthulucene, secularism toward animism).

Here it may help to consider Latour's model of Gaia as "the most secular figure of the Earth ever explored by political theory." In the 2016 Gifford Lectures, "Facing Gaia: A New Enquiry into Natural Religion," Latour proposes that we abandon the idea of "natural religion" (which Blake's "There is No Natural Religion" satirizes as a secular-sensationalist belief system) on the grounds that the category of "nature," to which science has turned as the "ultimate arbiter," is itself a theological construct. Earth, or Gaia in the secular sense of "an entity that is composed of multiple, reciprocally linked, but ungoverned self-advancing processes," he suggests, is a better term than nature. As such, he presents Earth as not unified but compositional, not ontological but "geostorical."

Latour's point, which he has been making for decades, is the need for a political ecology or "political theology" of actants that have been bracketed by, or unrepresented, in discourses such as religion, politics, and science. For Latour, "the age of [scientific and religious] faiths is over." Religious faith in special agencies that might lead to milder outcomes in the ecological emergency, and scientific faith in future advances that might do the same, both fail to register that the very cause of the problem has been an unwillingness to face Gaia, "that wholly secularized and earthbound set of processes." As he explains in "Once out of nature," the first in the six lecture series, he hopes to foster a transdisciplinarity (across science, politics, and theology) for which the primary model is that of compositional assemblages that are both secular yet more-than-human, or an awareness of the earth as "what mobilizes everything in the same geostory":

The reason why I want to draw on those three different fields at once is because I wish to shift your attention from the science, politics and religion of Nature to the science, politics and religion of the Earth. The two should not be confused any more. Earth should be understood as a historical, or better, as a geostorical adventure, a term I will propose so as to absorb what it means to live at the epoch of the Anthropocene.

To clearly disengage the question of the historical Earth from that of Nature, I will invoke the controversial figure of Gaia, borrowing James Lovelock's term for an entity that is composed of multiple, reciprocally linked, but ungoverned self-advancing processes. Far from being the Sphere that Atlas holds on his shoulder, or the Creation that Saint Christopher feels when he helps the child Jesus to ford the river, or any unified and living Globe, Gaia, as I will show at length, is the most secular figure of the Earth ever explored by political theory. It is because it is not already unified that it should be composed, thus becoming the only entity able to mobilize in a new way science, politics and theology.

The project I will pursue in this lecture series could receive the label of political theology, an even stranger and more unusual one to be sure, because it will be a political theology of nature. To put it as starkly as possible, I would claim that those who intend to survive the coming cataclysms of climate on hope and faith, or who square off against it armed only with the results of externalized and universal knowledge are doomed. The age of such faiths is over. I hope to show that it is by facing Gaia, that wholly secularized and earthbound set of processes, that there is a dim possibility that we could 'let the Spirit renew the Face of the Earth.' (Gifford 1 'Once out of nature' 9-10)

In a sense, Latour's response to the "intrusion of Gaia" (Stengers) is simply a pragmatic and realistic choice to abandon outworn categories that perpetuate the problem of the confusion of tongues across the disciplines. This response works within the tradition of secularism and, even, of sensationalism. Latour's Gaia is a kind of compromise between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*; the "agency" of nature or earth is restored to visibility, whether or not that agency involves feeling or mechanism. Yet, the question remains whether his model (which is *not* post-secular) presents enough of a challenge to sensationalist psychology, or to the modern foreclosure of sympathy/relation to which romantic poetry responds. Does Latour venture into "etho-ecology" with Stengers, or into "sympoiesis" with Haraway, or "intensivity" with Braidotti? Does this require a post-secular shift from optics to haptics, modernity to alternative modernity, for which, in the early nineteenth century, romantic poets were asking?

^{xxxiii} Blake named secular materialist optics the "covering Cherub," referring to the cherub with the flaming sword that guards the gates of paradise, which I read as the gates of imagination or vision. Here, vision is perhaps a more helpful term than imagination, because vision hints at a postsecular mode of seeing or attention, and reflects the romantic rejection of the reifications that limit seeing and that produce the split between science and religion.

Throughout Blake, the key idea is that each moment invites us to choose between Night and Day, reductionism and relationism, contracted vision and expanded vision. Blake calls contracted vision “error” or “Creation.” He has a funny way of speaking prophetically about vital psychological issues. For instance, in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* he writes that, “Whenever any individual rejects error, and embraces truth, a Last Judgment passes upon that individual,” and clarifies that “Error or creation... is burned up the moment men cease to behold it.” For Blake, “forgiveness of sin,” or the opportunity to drop the judging, censorious eye that separates us from relationship, happens continually in each moment of experience. His maxim “The eye altering alters all” foregrounds this continual perceptual choice between optic and haptic (spectral and relational) modes of vision.

His most ambitious work, *Jerusalem*, can be glossed as a fable of the ever-occurring perceptual choice between the optic and the haptic, or of the difference between looking through and with the eye. On the surface, it is a simple gnostic allegory in which Jesus calls the fallen Albion to return, “but Albion has turned away and in his jealousy hidden his Emanation Jerusalem from her divine bridegroom” (Damon 11). Albion has fallen like a meteor, “a Rocky fragment from Eternity hurld / By his own Spectre... Into his own Chaos which is the Memory between Man & Man” (J.3.6-8). Much of the poem is a depiction of how modern reason draws a contracted circle around itself, a circle of exemption and exception, in order to seal out ethical interrelationship. This is what Whitehead meant, a little over a century later, when he discussed the links between the “modern doctrine,” the “sensationalist mythology,” and modernity’s private psychology. Blake saw early on how, split into physics and metaphysics, science becomes a self-interested “Spectre” in “deadly sleep” and religion a “fallen Emanation” or “cruel Shadow” (11).

Fortunately, a major theme – perhaps the essential theme in both Blake and Wordsworth – is that reintegration and renovation can happen here and now in the act of attention. In fact, we can see a remarkable thematic parallelism between Blake’s magnum opus *Jerusalem* and Wordsworth’s unfinished *The Recluse*. A kind of marriage or consummation between the human senses and the living universe has been deferred, so that the “sensual” – or committed to a materialist view that Blake associates with Vala, or barren nature, split from the emotions – may rouse from their sleep of death. In a famous passage from what would have been the prospectus to *The Recluse*, Wordsworth wrote:

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:--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... (*Grasmere*, 800-815)

In “Auguries of Innocence,” Blake likewise emphasizes the fact that a sense of innocence or of intensive interrelationship is possible in each ordinary moment, inviting the reader:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

These auguries end with a lyrical chant, akin to a nursery rhyme, which one could well imagine Blake singing aloud:

Every Night & every Morn
Some to Misery are Born
Every Morn and every Night
Some are Born to sweet delight
Some are Born to sweet delight
Some are Born to Endless Night
We are led to Believe a Lie
When we see not Thro the Eye
Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night
When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light
God Appears & God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in Night
But does a Human Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of day

The point of this chant seems, again, to be the notion that the gates of paradise are barred only by an epistemic regime that contracts the senses, or by a modern contract to limit attention to the naturalistic or mechanistic. Again, Blake goes into this in some of his earliest works, such as *There Is No Natural Religion*, which parody and subvert empiricist psychology, in ways that agree with Whitehead's assessment in *Process and Reality* that "Orthodox philosophy can only introduce us to solitary substances, each enjoying an illusory experience" (PR 50). In the concluding lines of "Auguries of Innocence," Blake calls this reductionist picture of experience Night, because psychologically it's quite depressing. The Morn and the Night are not literal, but are figures for modes of attention – which Blake, early on, casts as innocence and experience. If Night is a lie, it is also a perceptual regime, and in that sense less a belief than a form of doubt or disbelief – a limit we set on sensitive seeing.

Attention, Blake implies, opens us from the optics of finitude to a haptic dimension of infinite interrelations or what Wordsworth calls "interfusion." With these lines at the end of "Auguries of Innocence," Blake is also making a jab at what it means, in conventional religion, to be inspired, awakened, or reborn. Conventionally, from the point of view of Night, or materialist psychology, religion means imagining oneself saved by a pure and transcendent Being. By contrast, Blake's point is that a sense of a rebirth to infinite interrelations happens not through some external agency, to be worshipped and warred over, but through love in the sense of attention. This is the implication behind Blake's quip that:

God Appears & God is Light
To those poor Souls who dwell in Night
But does a *Human* Form Display
To those who Dwell in Realms of day

In his peculiar symbolism, the six thousand years of history come to an end in each moment of inspiration or attention. So, it is with good reason that readers have emphasized the lines from *The Marriage of*

Heaven and Hell about the world appearing “infinite and holy” when the “cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of life.”

^{xxxiv} One might say that Blake (and Keats) do register the modern impossibility of returning to naïve religious mythology, but also show that modernity imposes false limits when it equates the rejection of traditional religion with the rejection of fluent metaphysics, or when it imposes a private, sensationalist psychology on experience. The insight of religion – that awareness is shared and undivided – still holds for the British Romantics.

^{xxxv} Morton’s notion of the intimacy of “the mesh” and of the “strange stranger” contrasts with Wordsworth’s notion of the “familiar” (less dulling custom or preconception than affection or felt-relation). In Morton’s dark ecology, custom or familiarity shields us from an undomesticated strangeness that presses upon us at all sides. Like Blake, he aims to defamiliarize and decolonize perception. By contrast, Wordsworth asks us to become *more familiar* with the world. The difference may be one of semantics, but one highlights a usage of the term “familiar” that modern readers may find odd. I would argue that both Morton and Wordsworth are concerned with attention to the concrete, with the difference that Morton seems less apt than Wordsworth to concur with the Whiteheadian notion of the concrete as lived intuition of a feeling universe. So it remains ambiguous whether, from a Whiteheadian view, Morton continues to engage in abstraction at the expense of “the obvious,” as suggested in Whitehead’s observation: “Familiar things happen, and mankind does not bother about them. It requires a very unusual mind to undertake the analysis of the obvious” (SMW 4). Yet Morton’s avowed affinities with Blake suggest a drive to cleanse the doors of modern perception and reveal the hidden infinite in ways that prove etho-ecological.

^{xxxvi} “The Cartesian doctrine of the ‘realitas objectiva’ attaching to presentational immediacy is entirely denied by the modern doctrine of private psychological fields. Locke’s doctrine of ‘secondary qualities’ is a halfway house to the modern position, and indeed so is Descartes’ own position considered as a whole. Descartes’ doctrine on this point is obscure, and is interpretable as according with that of the philosophy of organism. But Locke conceives the *sensa* as purely mental additions to the facts of physical nature. Both philosophers conceive the physical world as in essential independence of the mental world, though the two worlds have ill-defined accidental relationships... But Descartes and Locke abandon the ‘realitas objectiva’ so far as *sensa* are concerned (but for Descartes, cf. Meditation f,t “it is certain all the same that the colours of [497] which this is composed are necessarily real”), and hope to save it so far as extensive relations are concerned. This is an impossible compromise. It was easily swept aside by Berkeley and Hume. (Cf. Enquiry, Sect. XII, Part I.f Hume, with obvious truth, refers to Berkeley as the originator of this train of argument.) The modern doctrine of ‘private psychological fields’ is the logical result of Hume’s doctrine, though it is a result which Hume

‘as an agent’ refused to accept. This modern doctrine raises a great difficulty in the interpretation of modern science. For all exact observation is made in these private psychological fields.” (PR 325-6)

^{xxxvii} The value, and the limitations, of this systems approach comes across in Lussier’s citation of Varela’s enactivist model of mental experience. Here, Varela and his co-authors mention Hume as a precursor to their own Buddhist-influenced thought, which, from a Whiteheadian (though less so from a Deleuzian) perspective is problematic, considering Whitehead’s critique that Hume’s sensationalist “bundle” theory of the self actually presumes mind in the background.^{xxxvii} Humean optics (dissatisfactory from a Whiteheadian perspective because, in deconstructing the illusion of the self, it tacitly posits the autonomous mind as a metaphysical ultimate, without registering the infinite interrelations that become visible when optics yields to haptics, or when the very notion of serial, discrete moments is exploded) appears to persist in systems theory, and in the enactivist account cited by Lussier:^{xxxvii}

“Moment by moment new experiences happen and are gone. It is a rapidly shifting stream of momentary mental occurrences [where] the shiftiness includes the perceiver as much as the perceptions. There is no experiencer, just as Hume noticed, who remains constant to receive

experiences, no landing platform for experience. This actual experiential sense of no one home is called selflessness or egolessness.” (Varela et al. Embodied 60-1; View 1-15, 95-1 1 1)

On the whole, however, Lussier deepens the ecocritical approach by venturing past an analytic stance toward an understanding of the quantum effects at work in Blake and Deleuzian aesthetics. He advances a reading of Blakean perception via integral ecology that he also presents as a quantum ecology, via David Bohm’s model of the implicate order.

^{xxxviii} As constructivist thinkers have underscored, secular humanism can hardly claim an innocent position in relation to catastrophic global warming. On the contrary, modern secular optics, with its tacitly narrow definition of what counts as human, on the egalitarian grounds of which the West has often rationalized its right to invade or violently intervene in other countries and cultures, is predicated on an erasure of, or a refusal to represent, the “middle kingdom” of nonhumans (Latour).

^{xxxix} Apropos of the question of how Blake anticipates the speculative feminist critique of secular humanism’s centered optics, one may return to the apparent ambivalence about sense experience in both Blake and Wordsworth. When to trust, when not to trust, sense-perception? Does sense-perception lead to enthrallment or open into freedom? As I have examined, the crucial difference is the Whiteheadian distinction between sense-perception and sense-*reception*. For Whitehead, these are complementary but distinct *modes* of sense experience: perceptive (apprehensive) and receptive (prehensive), optic and haptic, discursive and affective. In determining between the two, the key factor is attention. Both Blake and Wordsworth persistently stress the event of poetic attention, expressed in Blake’s almost childlike rhyme:

Some are Born to sweet delight
Some are Born to Endless Night
We are led to Believe a Lie
When we see not Thro the Eye
(*Auguries of Innocence*)

To see “with” the eye, Blake repeatedly remarks, is to see through commonsense preconceptions or social conventions; this default optics of finitude is perpetuated by *inattention*, or by an avoidance of felt interrelation. By contrast, to see “through” the eye suggests a play on the phrase “see through” in its double sense of both looking through a static aperture with a fluent awareness, and of insightfully *seeing through* that aperture as socially constituted rather than natural. When Blake cautions that the automatic and codifying “Eye” leads us to “believe a Lie,” the lie in question is, in its deepest sense, “the Selfhood” or the “false incrustation” or “covering” implicit in the perception of spatial (private, isolated) forms of existence. The contrast he makes between the two modes of perception could not be more dramatic: some live in “Endless Night” (economical inattention) and others in “sweet delight” (etho-ecological attention).

[If Blake was sharply critical of the ecophilosophical notion of a “firmer trust” (Wordsworth) to be found in a pre-personal, visitational universe, this was because (as Quinney argues, after Frye’s *Fearful Symmetry*) Wordsworth struggled too hard to find a trustworthy basis for the self in matter. For Blake, this suggests residues of a belief in the “cloven fiction” (Frye) or dualism (what Whitehead calls the “bifurcation of nature”). For Blake, perception is infinite, and art, as organized perception, is its expression; there is no doubt in one’s potential for interrelationship (and certainly none of the laughable existential uncertainty entertained by the weak-minded speaker of “The Fly”). No Blake poem expresses this more directly than a brief couplet in *Auguries of Innocence*:^{xxxix} “If the Sun & Moon should Doubt / They’d immediately go out.”]

In that sense, Blake and Wordsworth are emphatically *not* ambivalent about sense experience. They celebrate it. The gloom that creeps in is not a haunting doubt about sense experience but a sobering

awareness that socially reinforced forms of inattention (commonsense, or what Wordsworth and Coleridge call the weight of “custom”) persist in barring sensitive, unconventional attention.

[Wordsworth’s expostulation to “the little child” and “best Philosopher” in the *Immortality Ode* suggests that the romantics did identify these two complementary modes of perception with innocence and experience. Here, it seems salutary to bear in mind that Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* offers countless subtle hints that childhood innocence involves a naïve trust of a duplicitous adult world; such naivety is bound to be shattered in ways that initiate innocence into duplicitous experience. As Wordsworth puts it:

“Full soon thy soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!”

Wordsworth implies that the “shades of the prison-house” or imitations of adult social roles, are already on the child, in his apparently innocent play:

“Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy...”

Here, Wordsworth, like Blake, does not diminish childhood innocence, but implies instead that once this innocence is burdened with experience, then, if it is to be renewed in ways that are less easily corrupted, it will require a kind of attention (a tender yielding of head/ego to heart/ relationship) that cuts through the duality of innocence and experience and sees into “the life of things.” Although Wordsworth’s tag-word “philosophic mind” might be objectionable to Blake, the basic etho-ecological principle is the same: i.e., that “Thanks to the human heart” and “Thanks to its tenderness” each moment can undo the conventional limits on felt interrelationship.]

There is, then, in romantic poetry, nothing dangerous in material attention. Or, rather, attention *is* dangerous, but only from the point of view of policing perceptual regimes. To attend to sense-experience is not to become its slave but to shift from the actual to the virtual, or from the optic to the haptic. In both poets, etho-ecological subjectivity depends on this willingness to see, or to become vulnerable to affective interrelations, as suggested in the marked complementarity of Blake’s notion of poetry as a mode of attention that exceeds Satan’s watchmen (biopolitical epistemic regimes) and Wordsworth’s notion of poets as watchmen who are “rouzed” rather than “enthralled” by “sensible impressions.”

^{x1} Even if there has never been a modern world, the humanities continue an anxious, and at heart skeptical materialist, response to the “crisis” of the decentering of the human. In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti’s speculative feminist reply is to ask why this decentering seems so threatening. (The center, after all, is what cruelly closes the human to the more-than-human). One of the reasons for this sense of “crisis,” of course, is that the “death” of the human seems to spell the death of the humanities, in that it opens the door to a brand of scientific posthumanism for which subjectivity is a “secondary quality.” Informatics seems to reign supreme.

For “dark ecologists,” such as Morton, this kind of informatics is less a problem than it may seem, provided one surrender the humanist fantasy that privileges life over nonlife, subjects over objects. Indeed, he presents humanism, not science, as the discourse driving the current great extinction. In this respect, the “humiliation of the human” (by Darwin, Marx, Freud, and Derrida) has the positive effect of making the “ecological thought” possible; it explodes the humanist construct of “Nature” as “out there,” and instead makes it impossible to continue to conceal from ourselves the intimacy of the so-called

human with the nonhuman, or of exceptional human consciousness with information. For Morton, the new visibility of the fact that the world is composed of information “all the way down” should be vitally embraced by critical thinkers if we are to recognize the high price of human exceptionalism, and begin to live and think ecologically, before we lose the chance to respond realistically to the ecological crisis.

Like Morton, Braidotti seeks ways to affirm the decentering of the human as an ecological event, but with more emphasis on affect than on information, and with greater optimism about subjectivity. Although speculative feminism, as a dynamic movement, does on the whole tend to inhabit a strange and vibrant line between a nontheistic postsecularism and a secularism pressed toward its radical empiricist limits, in my view, Braidotti’s brand of vitalist materialism does more to test the “ontological underdetermination” (Segall) of current “embodied” modes of posthumanist science and philosophy (from quantum physics to enactivism to neurophenomenology), and more to dethrone secularism’s sensationalist optics, than Morton’s dark ecology. Braidotti and Morton present, then, an interesting contrast between constructivism, and its aesthetic ontology (“the affective turn”), and the more traditional poststructuralism (“the linguistic turn”) to which it responds – not to mention an interesting divide, within both speculative realism and ecocriticism, between what I have called speculative materialism and critical materialism. More simply, Braidotti, with her politics of zoe, might be equated with the more-than-human, and Morton with anti-humanism.

In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti acknowledges that her own brand of posthumanism emerges out of a Continental anti-humanism she has had to gradually rethink. She explains her own growing affinity with the qualms that critics of humanism have felt about *anti-subjective* posthumanism. In doing so, she spells out a tradition of anti-humanism that is *not* anti-subjective. She demonstrates how anti-humanism was never necessarily anti-subjectivism. The kind of philosophical anti-humanism in which she was trained *might* see the decentering of the human (in its narrow eurocentric and colonizing sense) as an opening up of the possibilities for the emergence of new subjectivities and of new political ecologies. I write *might* because Braidotti also points out the ways in which modern critical theorists have been tempted to construe the “death” of the subject in negative rather than affirmative terms, a tendency she associates with necropolitics. (Modern thinkers, she suggests, have been seduced by a kind of anti-humanism that reifies or fetishizes the void, and its radical otherness or inhumanity, as absolute or as the “real.”) In response, Braidotti has mobilized her own “zoo-politics,” or a politics of life not as information in motion but as affect in motion. Yet, as I have noted, this does not prevent Braidotti from occasionally reverting to a more conventional model of affect *as* information-system, or from superficially casting movements like Romanticism and deep ecology as sentimental and essentialist.

Is it possible that this modern mistrust for the romantics is rooted (like the equation of deep ecology with essentialism and fascism) in anxiety about the decentering of a modern world that has never even existed? Eco-critical romanticists such as Timothy Morton and Louise Economides have turned to Heidegger as a means of situating movements like romanticism and deep ecology in relation to “a truly post-anthropocentric position.” (Shaviro’s *Without Criteria* contrasts Heidegger with Whitehead, asking what difference it might have made if Whitehead rather than Heidegger had been the chief predecessor of twentieth century critical theory). Arguably, these attitudes toward romanticism and deep ecology may exaggerate the threat they pose. One may for example overreact to deep ecology, on the grounds that essentialists may take it as a discourse of purity and ignore its primary, non-essentialist emphasis on interrelation. Likewise, one may move too quickly to dismiss both romanticism and deep ecology as aesthetic ideology (as Morton sometimes seems to do), without registering the challenge it poses to the essentialism implicit in sensationalism.

Anti-essentialists, like the 1790s British intellectuals cast by one historical materialist camp (Eagleton) as “anti-aesthetic” progressives and by another (Makdisi) as “hegemonic radicals,” tend to align with scientific posthumanism, a materialist perspective that is tacitly idealist and disembodied. After all, for

Whitehead, what scientists designate as concrete or “physical” turns out to be a representational image, rooted in an epistemic theory of sense perception. Posthumanism, in that sense, is nothing new, but a logical continuation of the modern move to purge the *sensa* of what might be called feeling, tenderness, or sensitive intelligence.

Here, it bears remembering that neither Blake nor Whitehead were either anti-science or anti-humanism. Nor were they militant in their critique of modern optics. In many ways, both Whitehead and Blake enact a mythopoieic drama of integration or “mutual forgiveness” (Tweedy), which may be passionate and sharply ironic, but exemplifies the optimistic, generous humor of a poetry and a philosophy that has undone the modern bar on metaphysics.

^{xli} The “error” that, for Blake, requires “mutual forgiveness of sins continually” is *not*, crucially, passion, or the mistakes one makes because one is insufficiently rational, educated, disciplined, or enlightened. Error, in Blake, relates not simply to secular considerations, but to a deeper misconception, akin to “ignorance” in the sense of “sin,” but with the important distinction that the sins to be forgiven are not socially proscribed acts (the social sins of lust, greed, laziness, and so on) but the perceptual error of perceiving a world of independent identities: the sensationalist misperception of a separate selfhood. Jeanne Moskal puts Blake’s concept of error in the context of Godwin’s 1790s radical intellectual model of the dynamics of error and forgiveness:

In Blake’s own time, a prominent spokesman for the view of human offense as error was William Godwin. In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Godwin writes, “Vice and weakness are founded upon ignorance and error.” His position follows logically from a view of the self as fundamentally unified. Godwin makes precisely such a claim: “We are no longer at liberty to consider man as divided between two independent principles, or to imagine that his inclinations are in any case inaccessible through the medium of reason. We find the thinking principle within us to be uniform and simple . . . [and] susceptible of unlimited improvement” . . . the popularity of Godwin in the 1790s makes it likely that Blake knew the general outlines of his theory.

Error makes the process of forgiveness unnecessary, because error is an offense against an impersonal standard, truth, and errors, at worst, are “wrongdoing.” Forgiveness presumes the violation of a relationship between offender and victim, a violation of wronging another human being. (Moskal 48-9) [*Blake, Ethics, and Forgiveness*, U of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 1994]

In Blake, by contrast, the process of forgiveness is continuously necessary in each experiential event, because a violation of interrelationship is ceaselessly intruding into perceptual moment. Error, then, is inattention, which constantly reintroduces the subtle belief in an independent self, and forgiveness is (akin more to experiential compassion than to act of judgment) sensitive attention.

^{xlii} Ironically, such an awareness of blissful, pan-experiential commingling might be understood as religious experience without dogma (and, in that sense, a kind of unbiased and clear scientific attention).

^{xliii} Ironically, what we dismiss, through bias, as beyond our experience *is* then ejected from our correspondingly narrowed experience. “Much Sense” (rational normative common sense) is, for disciplined and committed poets, “the starkest Madness” because, as Blake suggests, it consigns one to a condition of “indefiniteness” or “doubt” – the “stark” position of an isolated center in a cold and meaningless universe. Yet normative sense is hyper-vigilant about the *threat* of haptic aesthetics to its self-limited regime.

^{xliv} Dickinson’s evocative line, “To hold our Senses — on —”, reminds me of Whitehead’s metaphysics of patience, endurance, and etho-ecological trust, and his (prehensive rather than cognitive) view of nature as “providing a foothold.” Stengers clarifies:

. . . “foothold” does not designate the act of taking hold but what the mind, or knowledge, requires from nature, what it needs to be offered by nature if its operations are not to be illusory, if the

trust that leads us to speak of a knowledge about nature is to be confirmed... the present event and the percipient event are the “footholds” required by the problem of “due attention,” a problem designated by the term “awareness”... the body is therefore not what explains but what testifies... Attention itself would thus be that aspect of bodily life that testifies to a risky solution, to the choice of events capable of “attracting attention,” or breaking the relation of cogredience... Attention explains nothing: the testimony concerns the solution by which the problem exhibits itself but does not explain the problem” (TWW 67-69).

Whitehead’s notion of the “foothold” emerges, apparently, in response to the problem pointed out by William James that the sense of the present only happens after-the-fact. In that sense, when one points to nature for evidence or verification, one is pointing not to the lived experience but to an image or abstraction. Later, Whitehead’s relationship to the Jamesian question of the “specious present” shifts: “When Whitehead became a metaphysician, conscious experience became a creature of passage, which itself has become creativity” (72). Stengers brings out the main point that “the question raised by Whitehead will never be that of knowledge faithful to the truth of that experience” (112). Nature is not there for verification or explanation. Truth is “not on the side of right, or legitimacy, but on the side of its consequences” (112). Nature is that with which attention is in relation, and, by implication, inadequate kinds of attention lead to ecocidal societies, just as ecocidal societies may greet etho-ecological attention as perversion, insanity, or heresy:

The importance of William James for Whitehead’s transformation into a philosopher cannot be overestimated... the very construction of the concept of nature accomplishes a junction, which had remained rather implicit in James, between radical empiricism and pragmatism, between nature as what we are aware of, and nature as providing a foothold. In particular, unlike Bergson, it is at the level of this foothold, and not of experience in its immediacy, freed from what makes us calculate, verify, and hesitate, that a relation with evolutionary thought is established... Whitehead is, after William James, one of the very rare philosophers of the twentieth century to have fully envisaged the consequences of the Darwinian evolution for the classical problems of philosophy. Nature neither explains nor justifies anything, but it is pragmatically implied in the consequences that verify, or fail to verify... the appropriateness of a kind of attention. Perception implies the risk of trusting what is perceived, a trust whose practical consequences may entail the death penalty for impertinence. (113)

I make this connection between Dickinson’s mode of patience and endurance, and Whitehead’s, because both point to a kind of non-appropriative attention that, as Francois puts it, lets things pass, without for that matter denigrating their value. Whitehead evokes with his comment that “salvation of reality is its obstinate, irreducible, matter-of-fact entities,” and, more famously, when he speaks of the “consequent nature of God” in terms of tenderness or “infinite patience”:

Another image which is also required to understand his consequent nature is that of his infinite patience... we conceive of the patience of God, tenderly saving the turmoil of the intermediate world by the completion of his own nature... He does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it...

Dickinson, in this poem, has the peculiar knack of displaying the infinite voidness at work in finite things. (Again, one might recall Blake’s proverb of hell: “Eternity is in love with the productions of time.” Like Whitehead, she hints that this voidness (extra-being, intensivity) is not alien but tender, not estranged from the world but intimate with the world, and that its very nature is attention. Both point to the “open secret” that to love things is to let them pass.

^{xlv} Blake’s *The Fly* explores the nihilism that underlies the progressive thought of thinkers like John Locke, Adam Smith, Erasmus Darwin, and William Godwin. These sensationalist philosophers were

nihilistic, in Blake's account, because they view man as a natural organ subject to objects of sense. Hence, a rational person can discipline himself, or learn to be "sensible," by limiting his notions to facts of sense, thus producing a rational society. For Blake, the problem is that sensation is organized by the organs, or that sensation is subjected to epistemic regimes of "sense." The modern epistemic regime instituted a philosophy of "access" that gives primacy to the human knower, striking a sanitizing line between persons (educated male Europeans) and nonpersons (non westerners, non males, non citizens, non humans).

^{xlv} This association of modern lyric with a brain in ferment, faced with a cold inanimate world, after the "thunder of a war . . . by giant hierarchy / Against rebellion" (222-4) has an important precursor in *Dejection: An Ode*.

^{xlvi} If the "sensationalist myth" had it that discrete sense-data enters a radically isolated brain, this model was not innocent of political agenda. Blake was not alone in seeing this new optics of the "microscopic eye" (Goodman) as nightmarish. For Blake, and his fellow romantics, it meant the undermining of "human" vision, and the deanimation of the world, by an increasingly instrumentalized mode of rationality. As Lussier explains:

For Blake, the English philosophical tradition of empiricism defined by "Bacon, Locke & Newton" was instrumental in establishing the enlightenment episteme in Western thought. The empirical method operates on an illusory objectivity and reduces nature to inanimate matter, allowing it to function simply as grist for the mill of the industrial revolution. The lone voice of philosophical dissent from within the empiricist enterprise was that of George Berkeley, whose suggestion that "Nature" functioned as the "visual language of God" retained an element of spirituality in the landscape and proposed a structure of communication as the defining aspect of that relationship. However, once the enlightenment episteme gained ascendancy as the privileged paradigm for conceptualizing the relation of man to nature, eighteenth-century poets embraced this imaginary structure. The poetic celebration of Newtonianism during the mid-eighteenth century, best emblemized by Pope's "epitaph" for Newton, gave way at the outset of romanticism to a deep-seated suspicion of mechanistic philosophy and its accompanying subordination of nature in the service of technology. ("Blake's Deep Ecology," 392)

^{xlvii} Again, I would emphasize that there are two salient yet irreconcilable ways to read the poem. One is to reject the hypothesis that thought is life. In that case, we really are in a happy position. Nothing divided the human and nonhuman to begin with. As Timothy Morton reads this poem, and as he reads *Frankenstein*, life was already freaking strange to begin with, a relentless alterity, a strange stranger, an intimacy with what we are not, information without a container, a mesh. We were never human to begin with. This sets loose a great deal of posthumanist vitality, but not for Morton any sort of vitalism, or stickily embedded, relational lifeworld. Instead, for him, it allows us to throw out the idea of nature, and go eco-semiotic.

Yet what if the speaker refers to "thought" only in the most contracted sense of eighteenth century sensationalist psychology? In that case, the equation of life with thought is rather nasty. In *There is No Natural Religion*, an early illuminated manuscript, Blake parodically dismantles the syllogistic logic of reductive materialism. In plate A,^{xlviii} Blake presents the dominant epistemology:

Plate a3
Man has no notion of moral fitness but from education
Naturally he is only a natural organ subject to Sense

Plate a9
The desires & perceptions of man untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense.

To this orthodox empiricist psychology, he contrasts another set of propositions:

Plate b3

Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception, he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover

Plate b6

The bounded is loathed by its possessor, The same dull round even of a universe would soon become a mill with complicated wheels.

When Blake proposes that “self-examination” is the means to “put off” and annihilate away the “false Body,” he refers to the false concreteness of the abstract or isolated body. He makes the point in *Jerusalem* that abstractions (negations) do not exist. Nowhere are they found in the world. They are inert ideas that impose themselves on a fluent world:

"Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:
But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs

Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever...

Jerusalem, Plate 17, (E 161)

^{xlviii} Deleuze emphasizes difference itself as positive and compositional, or as a life of immanence without identity, while Hegel emphasizes negation as a positive, because it produces differentiated or synthetic identity. In Hegel, the I finally grasps or encircles the world. I becomes sublime and absolute. But in Dickinson's poem, we're not necessarily offered such a remedy for the alienation of the self-conscious agent from its identity with the absolute. The progressive dialects whereby Hegelian difference “drives itself beyond itself” towards “difference in identity” and “multiplicity in unity” - or towards pure spirit - seems to be short-circuited.

^{xlix} I take Bennett to mean by this cultivated sensory attentiveness a relaxed a relaxation of, nonverbal attention that undoes the human center and its possessive circumscription of socially constituted knower, or that unbinds epistemic sanitizations that impose limits on intelligent sensation. Bennet's materialist vitalism, like Braidotti's vitalist materialism, may tend to postulate “radical alterity” and may stop short of the post-secular turn more explicitly involved in Stengers's notion of etho-ecology, or of Haraway's notion of sympoiesis, but the emphasis on questioning human exceptionalism is a consistent aspect of speculative feminist materialism(s).

¹ In *The Fall of Hyperion*, Moneta is the last goddess/priestess - “forlorn divinity, / The pale Omega of a wither'd race”(287-88) - who continues to perform the rites in the old gods' temple:

‘This temple, sad and lone,
Is all spared from the thunder of a war
Foughten long since by giant hierarchy
Against rebellion: this old image here,
Whose carved features wrinkled as he fell,
Is Saturn's; I, Moneta, left supreme,
Sole priestess of this desolation.’ (221-27)

^{li} To understand the implications of Keats's conch, it may help to consider the “empiricist conversion” (*Pure Immanence* 18) of the idealism of Kantian aesthetics. John Rajchman comments:

Indeed Deleuze came to think that artworks just are sensations connected in materials in such as way as to free aesthesis from the assumptions of the sort of ‘common sense’ that for Kant is supposed by the ‘I think’ or the ‘I judge’. Through affect and percept, artworks hit upon something singular yet impersonal in our bodies and brains, irreducible to any pre-existent

‘we’ ... we must push the question of sensation beyond the phenomenological anchoring of a subject in a landscape... (*Pure Immanence* 9-10)

In some ways, this is precisely what Keats and Shelley do to Wordsworth: “push the question of sensation beyond the phenomenological anchoring of a subject in a landscape.

ⁱⁱⁱ I have already discussed the opening to *The Fall of Hyperion* in the introduction. Rather than risk taxing the reader, I therefore constrain further commentary here to this aside. “Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave / A paradise for a sect...” (1-2), the poem begins, setting up an immediate contrast between the “fanatic,” the “savage,” and the “poet.” Fanatics have dreams in the pejorative sense of ambitions or agendas. By contrast, to be savage is to be constitutively asleep. From out of that animist, semi-conscious, oral, sensuous condition, the savage “Guesses at Heaven.” Such dreams, fashioned out of the “loftiest” material of sensuous sleep, go unrecorded if “bare of laurel, they live, dream, and die.” A trace of satire tinges the phrase “bare of laurel,” as if to point out that no symbol of high poetic achievement can rescue one from the relentless process of living, dreaming, and dying. Indeed, what comes across in the phrase “live, dream, and die” is, arguably, Keats’s underlying (and rather Shakespearean) aesthetic proposition that what lies between life and death is “dreaming” – or that, in life, one is relentlessly *dreamed*:

Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave
A paradise for a sect; the savage too
From forth the loftiest fashion of his sleep
Guesses at Heaven; pity these have not
Trac'd upon vellum or wild Indian leaf
The shadows of melodious utterance.
But bare of laurel they live, dream, and die;
For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
With the fine spell of words alone can save
Imagination from the sable charm
And dumb enchantment.

The final phrase, “For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,” personifies “Poesy” in ways that imply a feminine or sympathetic principle in excess of human appropriation. Keats’s language suggests, then, less a rigid categorical distinction between the savage and the poet than the liminal emergence of a poesis as a “magical” (intensive, interrelational) event. Importantly, he registers from the start that this “magic” may prove, in hindsight, to have been a mere conjuring act - not magical at all but manipulative:

Whether the dream now purpos'd to rehearse
Be poet's or fanatic's will be known
When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave.

These last three lines imply that sensitivity is the crucial element, as a “fanatic” can certainly write eloquent verse.

[To dream, the passage suggests, is to experience the “occurrent” world-in-weaving. Fanatics distort this experience by placing the song in the service of a cause. Savages intuit the imaginative or intensive experience of the world, but have no means of communicating it. The poet listens to the wilderness and translates its intensity into words; etho-ecological influences insinuate themselves into verse.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet, as if to continue to undermine the special status thus given to poets, the very next move the passage makes is to assure us that everyone “whose soul is not a clod / Hath visions.” Keats suggests that every human being (or at least every “man”) is capable of expressing this mode of intensity that he calls dreaming, so long as, added to a sensitive soul, he has “loved / And been well nurtured in his mother

tongue.” In other words, what is needed for writing poetry is sensitivity, sociality,^{lii} and a feel for language:^{lii}

...Who alive can say,
'Thou art no Poet may'st not tell thy dreams?'
Since every man whose soul is not a clod
Hath visions, and would speak, if he had loved
And been well nurtured in his mother tongue.]

The ghoulish synecdoche (“When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave”) has excited wide critical commentary, with its implication that Keats’s compressed poetry is written in a hyper-awareness of his own limited time and of the unlikelihood of being critically recognized while he lives. Some critics have found the reference to his warm hand as strikingly embodied (Mulrooney) while others have commented on the ways in which Keats seems to extend this hand, from beyond the grave, to the reader. Either way, this poignant image implies that only time will tell if a poet’s vision expresses the prejudices of its time or is truly “occurrent.”

[Notably, a slightly disturbing association is set up in the resonance between “clod” and “grave”: cloddish souls or not, all bodies end up in the grave. In that sense, “real” life is the life of poetry].

^{liii} As Marshall McLuhan famously observed, “The ear favors no particular ‘point of view’. We are enveloped by sound . . . Where a visual space is an organized continuum of a uniformed connected kind, the ear world is a world of simultaneous relationships” (*The Medium is the Massage* 111). McLuhan links the ear world to a nonlinear prealphabetic mythic mode: “Myth is the mode of simultaneous awareness of a complex group of causes and effects” (114).

^{liv} 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.
'That I am none I feel, as vultures feel
'They are no birds when eagles are abroad.
'What am I then? Thou spakest of my tribe:
'What tribe?' The tall shade veil'd in drooping white
Then spake, so much more earnest, that the breath
Moved the thin linen folds that drooping hung
About a golden censer from the hand
Pendent. 'Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?
'The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
'Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
'The one pours out a balm upon the world,
'The other vexes it.' Then shouted I
Spite of myself, and with a Pythia's spleen,
'Apollo! faded! O far flown Apollo!
'Where is thy misty pestilence to creep
'Into the dwellings, through the door crannies
'Of all mock lyrists, large self worshipers,
'And careless Hectorers in proud bad verse.
'Though I breathe death with them it will be life
'To see them sprawl before me into graves.

Keats, *The Fall of Hyperion*

^{lv} The species of intensive cognition, or of affective aesthetics, modeled in Keats resonates with the account of imagination presented by Deleuze in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*: “The affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present in us, we shall call images of things.... And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines” (SPP 48). Crucially, for Spinoza “image-affection” produces real modifications or motions in the body. Imagination frees the body into the speeds and intensities of a “fine excess” (Keats, Letter to John Taylor, 27 February 1818), a “Life of Sensations” that is the “spiritual repetition” of life in a “finer tone” (Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817). The finer tone to which Keats refers resonates strongly, I would argue, with Whitehead’s model of prehension, which is not so much a “repetition” of sense-experience so much as the “causal efficacy” (haptics) that underpins “presentational immediacy” (optics). If affections, for Spinoza, are “inadequate ideas” (or, in Whitehead’s terms, if they are “accidents” of an “ultimate” creativity), they involve a haptic encounter with “powers” and transitions: “...the idea which constitutes the form of the affect affirms of the body something which really involves more or less of reality than before” (SPP 49). Spinoza’s account of imagination – in which “images of things” are “external bodies... present in us” - implies (1) his famous maxim that “the mind is the idea of the body” and (2) his notion of conatus as a constant reorganization and enlargement of an agent’s powers. In “Machinic Orality and Virtual Ecology,” Guattari describes this ecological or ‘imaginary’ agency as a non-coinciding body in the “fractal ecology” of “incorporeal fields of virtuality” (95). Peter Hallward quietly implies the continued romantic appeal of Spinoza as a constructivist, or immanent naturalist, alternative to Descartes and Kant:

If Deleuze rejects the Cartesian cogito as a viable foundation of thought it is because he affirms, instead, a Spinozist cogitor or being-thought. Against Kant, Deleuze will thus assume and renew the self-evident legitimacy of immediate intellectual intuition. Since he everywhere assumes our ability directly to see or conceive the literal reality of things, to grasp the immediate nature of things, Deleuze’s work is best read as a renewal or radicalisation of the affirmative naturalism he celebrates in the work of Spinoza and Leibniz in particular. The great achievement of these most uncompromising rationalists was to reverse the critical devaluation of reality or nature almost as soon as it began... (Hallward 11-12)

^{lvi} To be fair, in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth in fact refers to the “loss” of an initial physical or passional immersion in nature that, in later life, is recompensed by a more meditative etho-ecological attention:

That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused...

(83-96)

^{lvii} From the vantage of “virtual ecology” (Guattari), the poet's dream-vision is an act of higher wakefulness or heightened attention, precisely in that it presses past the "actual" (Bergson) toward the "virtual" (Bergson). Here, it is useful to remember that Deleuze and Guattari were no friendlier to

interiority and environment than later "second phase" poststructuralist ecocritics, such as Morton. Yet virtual ecology offers an alternative to anti-essentialist dark ecology in that it proposes an intensive rather than extensive ecology in the aftermath of the deconstruction of apparently "natural" discourses. Virtual ecology is "constructivist" in its "belief in the world" (Deleuze) or its optimism about an alternative mode of experience; extensivity may relax intensivity. Likewise, intensivity actively undoes - or "counters" - extensivity.

Thompson, in his own way, ventures toward the speculative metaphysics of an alternative modernity. Offering a potentially etho-ecological enactivist alternative to the cybernetic model, he models dreaming in terms of "self-organizing patterns of flow" that "guide" brain activity. In a prolonged discussion of lucid dreaming, he argues that dreaming is not just a byproduct of brain activity but is indivisible from "dynamic and self-organizing patterns of the flow," guiding brain activity just as perception does:

...from the lucid dreaming and dream yoga perspectives, dreaming is flexible and trainable in a variety of ways, and this fact implies that the mind can lead the way by altering how the brain and body sleep.... the sleeping brain reflects the dreaming mind no less than the dreaming mind reflects the sleeping brain. If the conscious state accompanying brain activation in sleep is both plastic and causal, then dreams cannot be froth on the waves of REM sleep; they must be dynamic and self-organizing patterns of the flow. Dreaming channels brain activity. With lucidity, it can even guide the brain in sleep, as perception does in waking. (178)

^{lviii} The fancy that grows over his mind, like a transparent shade, allows him to remain faintly conscious of the actual or extensive world, even as he perceives the world intensively. Shelley quickly introduces a disorienting language of "self-sameness," as if the experience of the dawn hills is not the 'actual' but is in fact a kind of déjà vu:

...and I knew
That I had felt the freshness of that dawn,
Bathed in the same cold dew my brow & hair

And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn
Under the self same bough, & heard as there
The birds, the fountains & the Ocean hold
Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air.
And then a Vision on my brain was rolled.

The diction passes into the past perfect, as if the dawn experience (supposedly the actual experience) already happened. The poet-dreamer "knew" that he "had felt" – as if the sensations (the "cold dew") never happened but were remembered from the imagination, or as if (in another uncanny doubling) the poet were aware of sitting in the dawn hills but it reminded him of a prior event of that same experience. A "self-same bough" is not a bough at all, but a virtuality, a semblance, a vitiating insistence upon by the repetition of the similitude "as."

Uncannily, though the transparent fancy has already, ostensibly, divided the actual from the virtual, the "strange trance" converts into a vision "rolled" onto his "brain." As it does in Keats, the medieval "methought" signals the abrupt transition to a dream (or virtual) landscape: "As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay / This was the tenour of my waking dream. / Methought I sate beside a public way ..." The "trance of wondrous thought" seems to non-coincide with the disillusioning "waking dream" (in which he comes to see the contributions and ambitions of all actants in history as bubbles in a stream).

^{lix} As Wordsworth famously puts it in *The Recluse*:

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.

^{lx}This seems true to the processual model of dreaming as “simulation” or “imagination” rather than “hallucination” that Thompson proposes in *Waking, Dreaming, Being*.

^{lxi} The question of the plausibility of such hypnagogia might come to mind here. For the moment, I can do no better than to quote from a Wikipedia entry on the subject, which points to the interest it has held for philosophers and poets, and the revival of such interest by Romantics, and, more recently, by neuroscientists. Importantly, too, the article points out that hypnagogia is accompanied by certain sensory experiences, including the sight of random motes or speckles, and buzzing or humming sounds, which might loosely correspond to the poem’s vision of the fountain-like “shape all light” and its repeated insistence on the flux of things. Researches have also found heightened suggestibility and a loosening of ego bounds in hypnagogic subjects. Perhaps most relevant to the “experience” recounted by *The Triumph of Life* is the phenomenon researchers have termed “*daytime parahypnagogia* (DPH),” which, interestingly, can be induced by the sort of all-night vigil to which Shelley’s dream-poet refers, as if the borders between “meditation,” “directed fantasy” and “spontaneous” mental imagery grew thin:

...the spontaneous intrusion of a flash image or dreamlike thought or insight into one's waking consciousness. DPH is typically encountered when one is "tired, bored, suffering from attention fatigue, and/or engaged in a passive activity." The exact nature of the waking dream may be forgotten even though the individual remembers having had such an experience. Gustelle and Oliveira define DPH as "dissociative, trance-like, [...] but, unlike a daydream, [...] not self-directed"—however, daydreams and waking reveries are often characterised as "passive", "effortless", and "spontaneous", while hypnagogia itself can sometimes be influenced by a form of autosuggestion, or "passive concentration", so these sorts of episode may in fact constitute a continuum between directed fantasy and the more spontaneous varieties of hypnagogia. Others have emphasized the connections between fantasy, daydreaming, dreams and hypnosis.

The article also points to the links between meditation and hypnagogic states:

In his book, *Zen and the Brain*, James H. Austin cites speculation that regular meditation develops a specialized skill of "freezing the hypnagogic process at later and later stages" of the onset of sleep, initially in the alpha wave stage and later in theta.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypnagogia>)

^{lxii} If in Blake the spiritual perception of the etho-ecological intensity behind external forms (the sun, the Bible, Locke, Pitt) is an “infernal” perception, this is because debarred rationality or the “Governor of Reason” inverts the truth: fallen, bounded, it forms its own so-called heaven in hell, and presents fluid interrelation (“Desire”) as fallen and hellish.

Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer of reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.

And being restrain'd it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire.

The history of this written in Paradise Lost, & the Governor of Reason is call'd Messiah.

And the original Archangel or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan and his children are call'd Sin & Death.

But in the Book of Job Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan.

For this history has been adopted by both parties.

It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out, but the Devils account is that the Messiah fell, & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss. (MHH)

^{lxiii} In a time of networks and technologies, Shelley's warning was not against science itself, but against science in the institutional heroic mode. While Victor's narration is in the gothic mode, which exaggerates his unique and agonistic experience, he sets his friend, Clerval, in a lyric mode, associating him with Wordsworth's poetics of ecological agency. In that context, the lyric, although it seems intensely private or personal, is an attenuated wavelength of sympathy. Ironically, the creature sees with great clarity that ordinary feeling is more wonderful than electric power: "No sympathy may I ever find... in what should I seek for sympathy?" (*Frankenstein* 164). It is only Walton, the failed aspirant, as a figure for the reader, who finds release from what both Victor and the creature, at different moments, refer to as the mechanical "series" of their "being." The masculine modern project is balanced by its feminine side. As Victor observes, off-handedly: "...a man is blind to a thousand minute circumstances, which call forth a woman's sedulous attention." (111)

Like his doomed friend/foil Clerval, Victor still has hope of "being formed in the 'very poetry of nature'": "His wild and enthusiastic imagination was chastened by the sensibility of his heart. His soul overflowed with ardent affections... (112-113). In the end, Victor exhorts (though not without being of two minds about it) Walton to seek tranquility over "apparently innocent" ambition: "Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed." (F 162) The agonizing, perverse self-contradiction Victor expresses may suggest that Satan, not Prometheus, is the real mold from which he is cast:

Which way I fly am Hell; myself am Hell;
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven....
The lower still I fall, only supreme
In misery: such joy ambition finds!

(Paradise Lost, Bk IV, 75-92)

^{lxiv} One of Wordsworth's persistent themes is recompense, for the loss of the child's timeless original immediacy, of the mature adult's philosophical awareness of an enduring "primal sympathy," a credo famously expressed in the Immortality Ode:

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind. (184-191)

^{lxv} Examining romantic science and sensation, I hope to unsettle what Lawrence Buell describes in "Ecocriticism: some emerging trends" as the corrective attitude "poststructural" second wave ecological

criticism takes toward “ecocentric” first wave ecological criticism. Buell contrasts the politically-engaged, poststructuralist, “second-wave” ecocritics with the politically “quietistic if not retrograde” first-wave: “. . . the turn toward *cultural* studies and *cultural* theory . . . can be explained partly as a reaction against what was alleged—with some if not complete justice—to be first-wave ecocriticism’s naively pre-theoretical valorization of experiential contact with the natural world. . . .”

Buell assumes that the valorization of experiential contact with nature by ecocritics like Bate and Kroeber somehow leaves out the cultural and political dimension, presenting it as obvious that such valorization is naive and solipsistic. Buell, of course, was writing at a moment before the so-called new materialism, and the partial dethroning of high theory, inspired by theories of affect. Though a critic like Kroeber may have been writing back to an intellectual moment dominated by cultural constructivist and historical materialist (that is to say, skeptical) takes on literature (particularly literature labeled “romantic”), this has to be put in perspective. Criticism has shifted, in ways Kroeber anticipated, out of an orthodox mode of cultural studies, and to reduce Kroeber’s ecophenomenological and neuroaesthetic interests to a reactionary “ecocentrism” seems a narrow appraisal (the sort bound to miss Latour’s call for a less deanimating ethos): “Second-wave critiques were also reacting against the philosophic ecocentrism broadly presupposed if not explicitly advocated in most leading first-wave work. This reaction was not merely theoretic and notional but also pragmatic and political, against what was widely—albeit lumpingly—perceived as the quietistic if not retrograde politics of ecocentric ecocriticism.”

One of the problems with reading Wordsworth solely through the lens of cultural theory is that such a ‘scholarly’ approach tends to obscure his emphasis on affect, the “unalienable” (PLB) pleasure and “great consummation” (*Home at Grasmere* 811) he offers as the antidote to the excessive goal-orientedness and instrumentality of “independent intellect” (10:829) – a key, as it were, to Kant’s kingdom-of-ends. Yet romanticism has come to be associated with what Derrida diagnosed in Rousseau: nostalgia for a pure origin or for a lost union with nature. Presupposing a divide between language and matter, the poststructuralist ecocriticism (of which Hess is an exemplar) that Buell valorizes follows New Historicism in arguing that “there is no nature” and in focusing on the “isolation of the aesthetic realm” (*ELC* 66) from actual historical pain. This perspective makes *The Prelude*’s emphasis on “unalienable” pleasure, and its apostrophes to “Visionary Power” (6:619) problematic at best.

^{lxvi} Locke offers a representational view of knowledge, in which the passive mind receives simple ideas from sensation. These simple ideas he holds to be real. In forming complex ideas, the mind actively combines simple ideas. Hence, complex ideas may be either real or illusory. All simple ideas are adequate, while complex ideas are either adequate or inadequate.

^{lxvii} Smith’s psychology can be summarized, informally, as follows: If I sympathize with you, I do so only through conjecture, extrapolating what you must be feeling from my own experiences of pleasure and pain. Moreover, I take the trouble to sympathize purely out of calculating self-interest. For, if I fail to understand others’ feelings, and cause offense, it will harm my social standing and my interests. To that end, I must instal an “impartial spectator” in my own mind, an objective agency that I produce by exerting my imagination. This spectator orchestrates my actions so that my selfishness does not ultimately conflict with my self-interest.

^{lxviii} In distinguishing primary from secondary imagination, Coleridge defines the former as the “living power and prime agent of all human perception,” and as a “repetition” of the infinite in the finite.” In other words, what Whitehead calls “prehension” (or the “primordial” event of the *sensa*) Coleridge calls primary imagination. Here, then, is an important instance of a romantic identification of imagination not with representation (or what Kant sees an image-making function midway between intuition, which is itself a synthesis of representational cognition, and understanding) but with primordial experience. In other words, Coleridge defines primary imagination *as* prehension:

“The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I AM. The secondary I

consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation." *Biographia Literaria*

Coleridge addresses the ontology of poetry, linking it explicitly to imagination as what Whitehead, pointing to the "realism" of aesthetic ontology, calls "perception in the mode of causal efficacy," arguing that unlike "Fancy," which is a "merely aggregative" faculty, "Imagination" is "a creative & coadunating faculty" (*Biographia Literaria*).

^{lxix} Coleridge's figure for liberty associates it, synecdochically ("subtle pinions") with a hawk or eagle, yet its primary association with breath or soul that never takes the form of human power suggests that it escapes extensivity. This notion of intensivity, and speed, resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's model of the virtual, and of the plane of immanence:

"There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules, and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. [...] We call this plane, which knows only longitudes and latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition (as opposed to a plan(e) of organization or development)." (*A Thousand Plateaus* 266)

^{lxx} Part of this reason for this divergence from systems theory (which remains serial and minimizes affect – touch, tenderness, interrelation) can be explained by reference to current popular neuroscience, as expressed on July 4, 2016 in a New York Times science article, "*Consciousness: The Mind Messing with the Mind*," by George Johnson. The article makes passing reference to "élan vital," an apparent allusion to Bergson. Here, one might remember the complex history of these ideas. As taken up by Deleuze, in *Bergsonism*, and as rethought by Whitehead in terms of "throbs of emotional energy" (PR 163) or affective inheritances (process-relations) across ceaseless transitions, the "élan vital" of the late nineteenth century is not the same thing as the organizing force (an independent power that works on "brute" matter) sought (by some, in electricity) in the late eighteenth century. As Roe (*Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Sciences of Life*) has suggested, 1790s intellectuals were optimistic about such an organizing power, as it accorded with a materialist republican politics that celebrated the right of reason to establish more rational forms of political organization.

^{lxxi} In an appendix to her essay, Levinson elaborates, addressing the manner in which new historicist reading focused on "genuine art" that involves an immanent critique of discourses rather than works that reinforce a normative aesthetics. What makes a poem a "dynamic element," she argues, is its capacity for "critical distantiation and disruption" or, she suggests, "irony." Methodologically, new historicist reading studies the "differential relations between the elements of the poetic text" which disclose the disjunction of the poem's "parole" (embodied speech) and its "governing 'langue'" (official discourse), to register this subversive potential of these "self-contradictory effects":

Let me comment briefly on this elusiveness and on a related topic, namely, the new historicism's reading of nature as a displacement of history. The aim of early new historicism was to explain how certain highly abstract and/or general and ideal terms signified within the economy of the poem. The poem was conceived as itself a dynamic element ("dynamic" meaning capable of critical distantiation and disruption) within the more encompassing and determinative economies of its time and place, economies to which the work as a whole alluded, its structure homologous with those embedding systems. By studying the differential relations between the elements of the poetic text, one could gauge the extent to which the poem projected its own "parole," as it were, both within and over against the governing "langue." (What should go without saying at this late date is that only a genuine work of art [as opposed to what we may term, following Theodor Adorno's usage, "tendency" writing], can produce these self-contradictory effects, effects that

come under the rubric of irony within a Romantic idiom, and, within a new historicist idiom, under the rubric of critical distantiation.)

She further explains how new historicism moved toward a methodology grounded in a model of negative aesthetics:

New historicism departed from the structuralist model I just sketched, however, insofar as it focused on textuality, or rather, grammatology, rather than argument... new historicism adopted a view of meaning as brought about by processes of internal negation (following Adorno, the dialectical relationship between affirmative culture and variously non-identitarian or negatively dialectical processes and effects) structured by larger systems in which the individual work actively participates. Guided by the grammar of the poetry (literal syntax as well as formal, dramatic, and rhetorical grammars), and by the poetry's patterns of representational difference (e.g., particularized vs general, concrete vs abstract, individualized vs collective), scholars were able to elucidate Romantic nature as a dialectical formation, an identity of identity and difference.

^{lxxii} Counter-culture makes visible those tender interrelations that underlie a “social” that is otherwise characterized as a bounded body of customs or conventions. If its motto is “love not war,” then love here (in ways that evoke Coleridge’s “intensest love”) is more promiscuous (and dangerous to the institutions in which love is authorized, such as marriage) than in religious contexts.

^{lxxiii} “Ironically, Althusser’s claims to have produced a Marxist science are realized now, forty years after, in theories of self-organization, emergence, complexity, autopoiesis, enactive cognition, and the like. Then again, perhaps this is not so ironic, for nearly all those areas of study were born in the 1960s, Althusser’s era, and many of them within the European scientific community. *These studies of systems and life forms describe another historical materialism than the one that Marx ushered in*, one that might help us make headway on a question that has been at the heart of critical work in the humanities since the 1980s. Namely, how can the phenomena traditionally assigned to the mind (rational and unitary or self-contradictory and heterogeneous) arise without that transcendental postulate, and (here is the hard part) without anything else rushing in to fill the vacuum (such as, modes of production, drives, history).” (Levinson 398, emphasis added)

^{lxxiv} For decades, the historical materialist catchphrase “history is what hurts” (Jameson) has implied that to *feel* history is to regain agency. Rather than be swept aside by a constructivist model of subjectivity, this catchphrase gains in relevance. A material history is enriched, not dismissed, by an attention to affect and immanence. This does not mean that Levinson’s new formalist rereading of *Tintern Abbey* is “right” while her earlier new historicist reading (in *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems*) is “wrong.” The problem that Wordsworthian imagination is involved in the social constitution of experience is not magically made to vanish, but neither is its implicitly philosophical challenge to historical forms of felt experience (and to epistemic limits set on attention and experience). Imagination thus becomes linked to political ecology, as Levinson’s “Romancing Spinoza” repeatedly demonstrates.