NATURE'S PERSISTENCE: ROMANTICISM AND THE RHETORIC OF IMPLICATION

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2019

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Cornell University, 2019

Nature's Persistence: Romanticism and the Rhetoric of Implication

Nature's Persistence draws upon the rhetorical strategies of Romantic writing to reimagine ecocriticism as also a more vulnerable, historiographically engaged epistemic practice. Responding to the tendency to see cast ecocriticism and ecological thinking more broadly as systemic, structural, or network-based approaches, my project argues for an ecocritical sensibility that proceeds through the reconstitution of minute histories. Rereading the works of writers in the British Romantic tradition including William Wordsworth, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, James Hutton, and Percy Shelley, I retrace a process of becoming "contingent" by where "ecological" relations come to be at stake through their entanglement in scenes of "un-learning," of encountering a "forgetting" that insinuates into what is self-evidently "environmental" in *modernity's history*. I argue that Romantic forms of the lyric, autobiography, and didactic poetry and prose consistently reassert perception and its discursive constitution as an *issue* in quotidian environmental engagement. While much of contemporary eco-theory focuses on questions of internal organization and the reconceptualization agency, often appropriating the "literary" as a vehicle for addressing questions of praxis, my project rearticulates ecocriticism as a provisionally "liberating" process of becoming *implicated* in the literary, in the lyric, autobiography, and pedagogies and the minute histories they begin to construct. Tracing experiences of the familiar and the didactic, renders seemingly immovable "material conditions" more malleable, more susceptible to reconfiguration. Similarly, while ecocritical engagements with "vulnerability" have been understandably preoccupied with bodies and affect under the neoliberal regime, the authors in this project recast "environmental vulnerability" as itself an epistemic vulnerability to forgetting and its resurfacing.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ruoji Tang received her B.A in English from UC Berkley 2010. She worked as an editor at the *Economic Observer* in Beijing, China before undertaking her doctoral studies at Cornell University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I draw my academic career to a close, I am grateful to the many people have contributed to this endeavor and supported me along the way. I am especially indebted to the members of my dissertation committee, Cynthia Chase, Amanda Goldstein, and Peter Gilgen, for their invaluable insights and their guidance. The completion of this project would not have been possible without the advisement of committee chair, Cathy Caruth, whose careful readings have been a source of inspiration and a model of excellence. I am thankful for all the teachers at Cornell including but not limited to, Elisha Cohn, Neil Saccamano, Jenny Mann, Harry Shaw, and Greg Londe. Additionally, the day-to-day management of this project would not have been possible without the support of Tracy Hamler-Carrick at the Knight Institute and help from the staff at the English Department, especially Kara Peet and Michelle Mannella.

This project also benefited from travel, sustainability research, and writing grants from Cornell's *Society for the Humanities,* and the Alan Young-Bryant memorial award. I am also grateful for the insights from the members of my Dissertation Writing Group, including Christine Yao, Kristie Schlauraff, and Natasha Nissounauth. I benefited from participating in the School of Criticism and Theory, especially the insights of Ursula Heise and Sianne Ngai. I am grateful to have met many inspiring colleagues that summer including my conference partner-in-crime, Christopher Walker and my friend and kindred spirit, Javier Padilla. I owe many of my insights to attendees at ACLA, NAASR, and PAMLA, and my fellow Romanticists at Cornell, Sang Wu, Jane Kim, Bernadette Guthrie, and especially, Mariam Wassif, with whom I have shared many of the highs and lows of this journey. As I reflect on my academic journey, I owe much of my intellectual development to my experiences at UC Berkeley in the English and Philosophy Departments. I am fortunate to have met so many excellent teachers who taught me how to read closely and attentively. Their numbers comprise but are not limited to Hubert Dreyfus (who will be dearly missed), Elizabeth Abel, Charles Blanton, Steven Goldsmith and especially, Katharina Kaiser. I am also grateful for the company and support of my friends in New York, Emmeline Jang, Anastassia Bendebury, and Vivian Lau, who were indulgent of my all-too-frequent surprise visits.

I have benefited from the advice and support of the members of my wonderful cohort, including Danielle Fuentes-Morgan, Alex Harmon, and Lena Krian. I am especially indebted to Emily Rials and Molly Rachel Katz and our wonderful, always-stimulating discussions. As I prepare to leave academia, I will bring with me the friendships that have touched my life during my years at Cornell. I am thinking especially of Corinna Matlis, Christina Black, and Ben Tam. And of course, I cannot say enough about my Ithaca family: Nancy Quintanilla, Kaylin O'Dell, Ruth Mullett, Hannah Byland, David Aichenbaum, Dakota O'Dell, Mike Wiczer, and Brittany Rubin. They have sustained me every step of the process. I am also fortunate to have had, during the composition process, the understanding, love, and support of my then partner, Nicolas Kline. Finally, I owe everything to my parents, Anlun Tang and Xiaoli Zhou who have been a constant, unfailing source of support and inspiration.

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> When a man has filled his mouth so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat and it must end with his dying of hunger, does giving food to him consist in stuffing his mouth even more or, instead, in taking a little away so that he can eat? Similarly, when a man is very knowledgeable but his knowledge is meaningless or virtually meaningless to him, does sensible communication consist in giving him more to know, even if he loudly proclaims that this is what he needs, or does it consist, instead, in taking something away from him?
>
> — Søren Kierkegaard, from *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus* [1]

In his 1797 essay "Of History and Romance," William Godwin proposes defense of the literary that is also a peculiar redefinition of history. "History," Godwin provocatively suggests, is "little better than romance under a graver name." [2] Typically read as a response to the uncertain events of the 1790s, Godwin's case for romance is absorbed by the inadequacies of the familiar narratives of power and succession. Historians, unlike the chroniclers of mere fact, do not merely concern themselves with records of facts insights into how things happen, the interactions of "successive circumstances," the "assimilat[ion] of new substances," how states "decay" (371). Yet as Godwin admits, speculating about the physical causation, far from fixing an act to its concrete outcomes, exposes action to the complexities of character, of intention, impulse, and motivation:

> To write romance is a task too great for the powers of man and under which he must be expected to totter….To sketch a few bold outlines of character is no desperate undertaking; but to tell precisely how such a person would act in a given situation, requires a sagacity scarcely less than divine. We never conceive a situation, or those minute shades in a character that would modify its conduct. Naturalists tell us that a single grain of sand more or less on the surface of the earth, would have altered its

[1] Kierkegaard, Søren. *Philosophical Fragments, Johannes Climacus.* Ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985.

[2] Godwin, William. *Things as They Are or the Adventures of Caleb Williams.* Ed. Maurice. Hindle. Cambridge: 2011, 371. Hereafter cited in text.

> motion, and, in the process of ages, have diversified its events. We have no reason to suppose in this respect, that what is true in matter, is false in morals (372).

To know intimately the mechanism of character, Godwin suggests, is the province of divine knowledge. Yet the weaknesses of romance compared to the factual record proves also to be a surprising source of strength. In a "few broad strokes," the writer of romance is made to "totter" in a way that the historian cannot. "We" become implicated by what we "never conceive," by "minute shades" that "would modify" conduct, not only in ourselves but in historical characters. "Not knowing" about the details of past addresses us through the contingencies of our own environment, and its inextricability from those of others, and the imprecision of "character" renders *our qualities* surprisingly amenable to speculative transformation. What "the naturalist tells us" can be captured in the rhetorical imprecision of "more or less," tethering the present to the possibilities of what "would have diversified," the "course of events."[3]

Godwin suggests here a peculiar pedagogy of natural necessity guided, not by facts alone, but the surprising manner through which the "present" expresses us constantly to the vulnerability to the mutability of our past. Instead of locating the present in an eschatological arc bending toward redemption, or in a course of progress indifferent to the attachments of the observer, "romance" opens the threshold of the present to relations that are speculative and modal, exposing the "I" to the "literary" effects of not knowing, suspending the compulsion to

[3] In another 1797 essay "Of an Early Taste for Reading" Godwin famously describes "literature" as forming a "grand line of demarcation between the human and the animal kingdoms." Any true taxonomic distinction between the human and the animal appear to concern the possibility of the "literary," as a category distinguishable from the other sciences. For more on the relation between the emergent, ascendant category of the "human" and Romantic literature, see my second chapter, and Bewell, Alan *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) and McLane Maureen N. *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

know for certain. Romance proceeds by taking seriously not "what happened," but what happens in the course of describing, and the subtle nuances that intrude upon the present, producing new, reflective orientations.

Ecocriticism: things as they are now

If ecocriticism in its earlier iterations has often seemed like *mere nature-worshipping,* contemporary ecocriticism presents itself as confidently political and backed by solid, scientific basis. Despite the anxieties and uncertainties that aggregate around our climate futures, environmentalism appears to express to point us our "responsibilities" in no uncertain terms. The Climate March as recent as 2018 rallied together under the banner of "Climate, Jobs, & Justice." The myriad of faces standing in a row, staring up from the pages of the *New York Times* or *The Washington Post* are admirable expressions of public anger and frustration. The easy headlines and palatable images of protesting coeds suggest that climate has brought forth a new era of democratic and planetary collective action. Similarly, Thomas Friedman's influential plea for a "Green New Deal," for instance, now embraced by Senators and activists alike, sees ecological sustainability as the site for a renewal of a robust Federal government and American industrial prowess: "we will only green the world when we change the very nature of the electricity grid — moving it away from dirty coal or oil to clean coal and renewables. And that is a huge industrial project — much bigger than anyone has told you… like the New Deal, if we undertake the green version, it has the potential to create a whole new clean power industry to spur our economy into the 21st century."[4]

[4] Friedman explains in a 2007 column for *The New York Times.*: "The New Deal was not built on a magic bullet, but on a broad range of programs and industrial projects to revitalize America. Ditto for an energy New Deal. If we are to turn the tide on climate change and end our oil addiction, we need more of everything: solar, wind, hydro, ethanol, biodiesel, clean coal and nuclear power — and

I open with Friedman's Green New Deal and recent climate protests, not to reject government solutions or to absurdly against climate action, but rather, to reflect upon the peculiar contours of the "ecology" thinking. On the one hand, "thinking ecologically" appears to place an unprecedented burden upon our epistemic engagements with nature. Yet on the other hand, ecological thinking appears to address us as rigidly systemic and structural, it requires a robust national government, a capitalist production-line, and owing to its urgency, alignment of previously inconceivable horizons of political organization, national, international, and planetary. No doubt, thinking ecologically is a daunting task, and we must begin where we are, as political and socioeconomic beings, yet much of environmentalist writing, popular and academic, appear to conflate "ecological sustainability" with "sustainability" of all systems, be they political, social, or economic. Dispersed across the various object-oriented, new materialist, and cybernetic theories under the banner of ecocriticism appears to be a tacitly agreed-upon understanding of ecological thinking as a project of inclusion, a praxis predicated upon the folding different organisms, species, and climates, into economic and political organizations that we already know. To borrow the provocative phrase of Mark Tercek, CEO of the Nature Conservancy, we are becoming "the investment bankers of nature," who "incentivize the use of natural infrastructure."[5] We care about the planet, and are eager to lessen our destructive impact.

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conservation…It takes a Green New Deal because to nurture all of these technologies to a point that they really scale would be a huge industrial project. If you have put a windmill in your yard or some solar panels on your roof, bless your heart. But we will only green the world when we change the very nature of the electricity grid — moving it away from dirty coal or oil to clean coal and renewables. And that is a huge industrial project — much bigger than anyone has told you. Finally, like the New Deal, if we undertake the green version, it has the potential to create a whole new clean power industry to spur our economy into the 21st century."

[5] See "Perspectives" from "the Nature Conservancy" website, especially "How to Scale Up Investments in Nature," from November, 2018. Tercek gives a more extensive account of his ideas in his new book, *Nature's Fortune: How Business and Society Thrive by Investing in Nature.*

Yet if "ecology" designates a "natural environment" already amalgamated, enmeshed with our political and socioeconomic histories, our practical infrastructures, what possibilities for engagement might there be in this seemingly overdetermined context? My project begins here, by asking what orientations, classifiable as "empirical," still have to play in problem that address us as oppressively systemic and structural. What might the stroke by stroke transformations of the *present* that Godwin identifies as the virtues of the literary, strokes that not only articulate character but reflect upon us as *characters and characteristics,* have to teach us about ecocritical practice?

Romantic anxieties, and new beginnings

As late as 2005, Lawrence Buell, remarking upon the emergence of ecocriticism as a discipline, wonders whether the tradition of Romantic poetry "calls into question just how marked a break from previous practice the contemporary movement [of environmental criticism] is."[6] Yet if Buell appears not to have anticipated the recent changes in the field of ecocriticism and their persistent disavowal of what Robert Nixon calls "the organic bond to the pulse of nature," he accurately diagnoses I think, Romantic poetry's persistence as a source of anxiety. Ecocriticism, if it is to be urgent and relevant, is preoccupied with *"marking a break,"* with genres of Romantic nature.[7] In her widely influential work *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* for instance, Ursula Heise disparages the naivety of critics that "rely on a Romantic and pastoral notion of nature that …claim[s] to be grounded in ecological science long after ecologists

[6] Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005. 2.

[7] Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011. 61. Hereafter cited in text.

discarded such views," arguing that "allegorical representations are generally ill-suited to reflect dynamic changes in global ecosystems." Frustrated with the limitations of the Bildungsroman and the pastoral, Amitav Ghosh declares in his popular work *The Great Derangement* : "if certain literary forms are unable to negotiate these torrents [of climate change], then they will have failed—and their failures will have to be counted as an aspect of the broader imaginative and cultural failure that lies at the heart of the climate crisis."[8] Without knowing exactly what "measuring up" will look like, it is peculiar the extent to which "climate" has become itself a formal thesis "taking measure" of our literary forms. What does it mean that so many of our familiar literary gestures, Keats's "nightingale" or "bright star," reappear as illusions that must be dispelled by forms of "engaged" eco*critique?*

Indeed if literary language becomes a problem for environmental engagement, its abjection serves an equally problematic purpose for an ecocritical vernacular drawn from cybernetics and systems theory. Bruno Latour's popular "actor-network theory" for instance, imagines the planet as "a single collective, defined as an ever-growing list of associations between human and nonhuman actors."[9] Donna Haraway writes in her introduction to the first volume of the *Journal of the Environmental Humanities*, that the contemporary world is composed "assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history" and "systemically linked patterns that threaten major system collapse after major system collapse after major system collapse."[10] Yet despite the scope of systems and cybernetic thinking, ecological thinking

[8] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016. 8.

[9] Latour, Bruno, *Politics of Nature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. 89.

[10] Haraway, Donna. "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" *Environmental Humanities,* vol. 6, 2015, 159.

in the manner of Latour and Haraway *continues to* be preoccupied with distinguishing itself from, and insisting upon a discontinuity with naïve or "unengaged" approaches of literature, refuting the reception of nature as "mere symbol" or "mere language."[11] Perhaps in order to enact what Haraway elsewhere calls "a time for beginnings, a time for freshness," the emphasis on assemblages and networks over literary forms appears to propagate a peculiar resistance to, and suspicion of, any relation that may seem to be mere "metaphor" or "thought."[12] Such a resistance nevertheless appears to aggregate anxieties around the manner in which a language associated with Romantic poetry in particular that both predates "ecology" and informs its predecessors, appears to lay claim to the same domain. [13]

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[11] Quentin Meillassoux, in his *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008) attempts to ground self-reflexivity in the fossil datum. For Meillassoux, to read the fossil *is* to concede its archaic existence, the accretion of time in the earth, and a determining temporal relation that enables the subject to glimpse a "trace" of *being* that precedes the its own givenness: "fossil-matter is the givenness *in the present* of a being that is *anterior to givenness*; that is to say, that an arche-fossil manifests an entity's anteriority *vis-à-vis* manifestation"(Meillassoux 14).To read the fossil, then, is to come definitively *after* the fossil, to concede the fossil as an event that is entirely separate and a not itself contingent upon observation. Ancestral events, in Meillassoux's configuration, are surprisingly enclosed "events" that sever perception from occurrence, eliminating the possibility of seeing, as the geologists of the "Sacred Earth" did, a sign of nature's abundant creativity or the residue of God's wrath, or more pertinently for our purposes what Wordsworth or William Blake did—the natural world as a "Book of Nature" in some capacity available for the perceiving subject. Substituting instead, the "truth" of radiocarbon dating, Meillassoux's proposal of thinking *with* the fossil appears to repeat one of the more recognizable gestures of enlightenment thought, severing scientific practice from tradition or in other words, becoming *modern.* Yet Meillassoux perhaps does it more stringently than and in a more miserly fashion than the very enlightenment thinkers he dismisses.

[12] See Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. 2.

[13] The teleological commitments of ecological thinking are traceable to the ecology's rapid rise to prominence in the early-twentieth century. Sir Arthur Tansley explains in his influential 1920 article "The Classification of Vegetation and the Concept of Development" that the relations between plants can be understood analogously as a totality of an "organic entity," governed by "organizing forces." The task of the ecologist is "recognising natural units of vegetation is the empirical method of observing and correlating what we see in the field"(Tansley 145). If ecology is a method of accounting for what qualifies as a "unit" constituted by its relations, it also leans heavily on the structuralizing tendencies of the human mind:

> "Nevertheless it is clear, even to the most superficial observer, that the complex of interactions between plants and their environment does lead to a certain degree of order in the arrangement and characters of the resulting vegetations. The human mind is irresistibly impelled to express this order in some systematic form, however incomplete its knowledge of the detailed relations or of the ultimate causes that give rise to the varieties of vegetation. And, further, a systematic form is indispensable as a framework into which to fit our investigations on the concrete phenomena of vegetation. The more "natural" this framework, the more closely, that is, it fits the observed facts, the better our detailed investigations of vegetation will be served. We must never conceal from -ourselves that our concepts are creations of the human mind which we impose on the facts of nature, that they are derived from incomplete knowledge, and therefore will never exactly fit the facts, and will require constant revision as knowledge increases"(120).

Tansley is careful to caution ecologists that the "systematic form" is a "framework" that can appear more or less "natural," but that it operates on the level of the concept. Patterns and order are imposed by the mind as a way of investigating "concrete phenomena." In other words, empirical encounter with natural phenomena contributes to the "constant revision" of an indispensable framework (in the mind).

Here I am not so much interested in the intricacies of the epistemic problem that ecological "systems" present but the peculiar way that the philosophy of the mind implied in "relations" and "systems," a problem of knowing and not knowing, becomes entangled with the problem of environmental change and destruction. Witness for instance what happens only a decade later when John Phillips promoted a broad ecological study of Africa that would address the realities of environmental protection. The project never came to fruition, but Phillips's 1930 Ecological Investigations in South Africa takes as its "scientific objects" of investigation "interrelations," "biotic communities," and "influent habitat conditions." Phillips departs from Tansley by combining "plant communities" and "animal communities" in "biotic communities." The decision is certainly intuitive if we apply contemporary understandings about the transfer of energy, but the presupposition of a community of "life" means that relations between organisms hitherto projected only in the mind must be subtended by actual, physical relations. As Phillips's oeuvre attests, the prominence of ecological studies in the early twentieth century cannot be separated from the question of environmental destruction. Phillips laments in his survey of South Africa the "destruction of plants and decimation or extinction of animals; introduction of alien plants and animals, such sometimes creating biological and habitat problems of the greatest economic importance; wrongly designed public works—such as roads, railways, drains, irrigation schemes—responsible for unnecessarily accelerated run-off of water and consequent soil erosion. In a word, [. . . the environment is] disturbed by man, to his own ultimate detriment"(Phillips 464). I am not disputing that infrastructural changes have damaged, probably irrevocably, certain biological environments. Yet in a strange way, parsing the damage that "railways, drains, irrigation" cause *binds* plants, soil, and animals together in "habitats," by positing a preexisting organizing principle of "life" that comes to be "possessed" in the *realization of its disruption*. The amenities of Western civilization not only comprise a system but enable the inclusion of historical nature as a set of preexisting relations that are interrupted and must again be restored. What for Tansley began as a theoretical, organic whole that appears more or less "natural" to any given eye becomes, in twentieth century ecological and conservational movements, a disturbance that binds us to a new, systemic, nature.

This anxiety, I propose, usually takes form of an unnecessarily robust insistence on the form of the real, as if for things to have *agency,* we must *not be able to* grapple with what we observe linguistically. Jane Bennett, in her *Vibrant Materials,* Bennett asks: "What if we loosened the tie between participation and human language use, encountering the world as a swarm of vibrant materials entering and leaving agentic assemblages?."[14] Bennett's theory differs from classical materialism, be it epicurean or historical-dialectical, in that it does not operate on the assumption that the language of life must be composed of something else and thus, enticing us to descend to the lower depths such decomposition promises. Instead, swarming materiality and agentic assemblage are what finally comes true *through language use* via the "suspension" of its human face. Relatedly, Latour argues for the inclusion of vegetables, microbes, and animals as "agents" of history but cautions environmentalists: "above all, do not try to turn toward nature. Any mention of 'coming back' to nature, 'obeying' it, "learning to know' it would be to *presuppose knowledge* where we had none" (38). [15] *Not turning toward nature,* Latour explains, means eliding exposure to scenes of epistemic dependency that take the form of "listening to" or "learning to know," (scenes, in other words, typically aligned with Romantic poetry). Latour happily includes vegetables and microbes as "agents" in our history but carefully refuses any historical-poetic inflections of the vegetal and the animal as the "presupposition" of knowledge.[16]

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[14] Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010. 107.

[15] Latour, Bruno, and Catherine Porter. *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime.* Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017. Hereafter cited in text.

[16] For instance, one might ask if we can read the "Blessed Babe*"* passage in Wordsworth or "Infant Joy" in Blake as what Latour would classify as "presupposition," or whether our relation with voices already unfolds a more complex relation. It's strange that Latour appears to accept the formal constitution of science, its insights and its impact, but not any awareness of "origination," of

I will engage with Latour more extensively in the fourth chapter on Percy Shelley's *Queen Mab*, but for now, I want to note that Latour's explicit attempt to sidestep the reflexive dimension of language, and its requisite possibilities of finite, confined scenes of learning to know (what William Wordsworth would have called nature's "abundant recompense") offers a peculiar entry point for contemplating what Romanticism might yet contribute to ecocritical investigations.[17] Latour's *insistence* on seemingly origin-less knowledge, disseminated by science, without "encounter" or personal impact, I propose, also enacts what Michael Marder astutely interprets as a "culture forgetful of life," one defined by the "forgetting [of] diverse lives in favor of Life."[18] Perhaps as a response to what Latour explicitly excludes in his construction of a network, this dissertation contemplates staying with the difficulties that "nature," not predefined as "organic" or "artificial," but what the weighty ambiguity of "nature" introduces, its insinuation both of something uncomfortably taken for granted or at issue of which we are unaware. the manner of insinuating older forms into language, scientific observations and implicating our thinking with questions of origins, of uncertainties that become an issue when we take up the question of ecology. What are the "histories," more explicitly, a craft or an art of "coming to terms," we appear to invoke without knowing? How do they differ from the alignments with the secular and the modern that an ecological present takes for granted?

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knowledge and the capacity of knowledging having to have come from somewhere. Perhaps this is a question of "letting sleeping ecological issues lie," as Timothy Morton puts it in an article contemplating the possibility of a "queer ecology"("Guest Column: Queer Ecology," PMLA 125.2 (March 2010) yet, this awakening seems to me central to a more flexible and more engaged ecocriticism.

[17] "Tintern Abbey." Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800.* Ed. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Dahlia. Porter, and Michael. Gamer. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008. 145.

[18] Irigaray L, Marder M. Through vegetal being: two philosophical perspectives. New York: Columbia University Press; 2016.

Vulnerable Planet, Vulnerable Epistemologies

Certainly, "precursors" to "ecology," a system of thought that historically, draws upon the analogy between an internal organization of the living organism and relations between organisms, can be discovered in Romantic poetry, be it epigenetic understandings of organic life and aesthetics or holistic theories of the mind.[19] Denise Gigante, for instance, identifies a "power" in "Romantic mimesis that must work itself out materially from within" that closely resembles the organizing powers of "ecology" that animates Latour's and Bennett's cybernetic inquiries. [20] Heidi Scott's discovers in Romantic aesthetics a "symbolic control and pleasure afforded by a simple system that models the macrocosm and also the vulnerability to absolute dissolution that models can exhibit," an aesthetics that preoccupies many environmentalist works aimed at coming to terms with finitude.[21] Yet instead of looking to Romantic Era scientific or aesthetic "models" that anticipates the vernacular contemporary ecological thinking, a project that might introduce a history of *ecology merely as the inevitability of* scientific progress, my project takes seriously a manner of "coming after" that *like Godwin's romances,* appears to *implicate us,* not in abstract horizons of becoming, but by tethering us to figures through which our own histories appear amenable to descriptive transformation. Whether absorbed by its status as responsive or reactionary, post-revolutionary or post-Enlightenment, Romantic authors in this

[19] See also Sharon Ruston's, and Faflak, Joel, ed. Marking Time: Romanticism and Evolution. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017.

[20] Gigante, Denise. *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. 166. Hereafter cited in text.

[21] Scott, Heidi C. M. Chaos and Cosmos: Literary Roots of Modern Ecology in the British Nineteenth Century. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014. 96. Hereafter cited in text.

dissertation attune us to a peculiar process of "determining" material conditions that also marks a trajectory of becoming vulnerable and susceptible, implicated in the manner of description, an implication that intrudes assumptions about ecological history as the history of modernization begins to compose a minute history of "ecological relations." This amenability of "ecology" to the pull of diverse *histories,* relations recoverable in the generic inflections of the lyrical or the pedagogical, I propose, not only engages in a more "reflexive" ecocriticism open to minor histories, but it presents an opportunity to recast "ecology" itself as a more historically susceptible and less formally rigid mode of inquiry.

Throughout the dissertation, Michel Foucault's account of representation will serve as a contrasting *point of reference.* Foucault is certainly right that optimization through multinational regimes can be simultaneously destructive of species and habitats to its own benefit, folding ever-greater components into its "care," and the ecological dimension of biopolitics will only become a more prominent area of exploration in the years to come. In many ways, emphasizing the vulnerability of "ecological" thinking to figural transformation follows Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's complaint about how Foucault's language can itself be "productive of reality" in mobilizing critical energies for "uncovering repression," suppressing the "middle range of agency" that involves "positive" qualitative discernments that keep agency alive.[22] I find that

[22] I am drawing from authors like Roland Barthes and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for whom Michel Foucault's philosophies initiate a strong desire to escape form the "repressive hypothesis," a desire that introduces the danger of its propagation on the level of theoretical epistemological inquiry, as if uncovering a positive, productive power lurking under the repressive hypothesis everywhere. Sedgwick writes in *Touching Feeling:* "his analysis of the pseudodichotomy between repression and liberation has led, in many cases, to its conceptual reimposition in the even more abstractly reified form of the hegemonic and the subversive"(12). What Sedgwick's thinking offers, I believe, is a way of connecting a more "active" subject as a corrective to the way Latour's and Bennett's subjects *are mere facilitators of "assemblages" and "feedback loops"* in a way that disappears the distinctiveness both things and people. Unlike Sedgwick however, my is not so much in affect as much as in modes of Romantic epistemology in the form of autobiography, lyric, and pedagogy that appear to serve a

Foucault is helpful for bringing out the emergence of an economizing tendency, a tendency toward to reorient representation toward the disclosure of modernity that Romanticism itself found distressing especially within the contention between "poetic" intervention and its subordination to different disciplinary fields of inquiry. Central to the question of thinking ecologically, I take it, is an invitation to expand "action/context" binary to designate not only unilateral approaches, but questions of accessibility and amenability to change that often pose themselves within epistemic-linguistic shifts the practice of environmental description or delineation, that as readers of Romantic poetry have often pointed out, but are often difficult to see from the vantage point of direct representation.

If Foucault proposes that modernity sees the realization of the sophisticated yet brutally physical anthropology of *homo economicus*, my interest is in what Gayatri Spivak already described in her 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," as the violent mutual constitution of an "irretrievable consciousness" and the historian by the legibility of a "social semiotic."[23] Spivak's insight, as I see it, involves the way our tendency to describe "socioeconomic forces" can and them by *fixing them in ever more sophisticated structure.* The capacity to receive forces as *social* may offer some alleviation of individual guilt or blame, but only by putting out of reach easier modes of receiving of objects and people, diverting us instead to the concretized sociopolitical matrix to which different "groups" have varying degrees of access, metastasizing a "structure" where we engage only "positionality."

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similar purpose, halting the constant *coming to terms* that Enlightenment knowledge appear to demand.

[23] See Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Morris, Rosalind C., ed. *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 256.

How then might Romantic reading, exemplified by Godwin's romance writer, attentive to the interplay of assertion and response in the act of delineating character, contribute to ecological understanding? To give one example of the compatibility of "Romantic" pedagogies with anthropological perspectives, I would like to look again at Anna Tsing's insightful analysis of the cultures of the Matsutake in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Tsing observes: "As sites for more-than-human dramas, landscapes are radical tools for decentering human hubris. Landscapes are not backdrops for historical action: they are themselves active."[24] But what does it mean for them to be "active"? Tsing translates one "activity" into another but also discovers a *sense of internal tension*. She writes: "Matsutake and pine don't just grow in forests; they make forests. Matsutake forests are gatherings that build and transform landscapes."[25] Tsing's prose requires doubling back, reinterpreting a scene of "grow[ing]," a growth not necessarily oriented toward the survival of the forest or the fungi's economic value (Matsutake mushrooms are more or less impossible to farm), as also a "gathering" and "building." [26] This double-perspective, tending both toward a less remarkable sense of "growing"

[24] Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: on the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

[26] A Marxist account would delve into depth the desire for seamless natural integration and the *making* of capitalist economies. John Bellamy Foster demonstrated in his *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* that Marx's economy can be reinterpreted as an "ecology" but crucially, not as an "organic synthesis" of nature and capital but through concept of "metabolic rift," a difference between the temporalities of economy and ecology introduced by the German chemist Justus von Liebig. Foster traces Marx's awareness of the crisis of viable soil in the colonies in the Americas and Africa and across Europe and argues persuasively that Marx reorganized his thought around the possibility of an ecologically sustainable agrarian economy. Yet for Foster, the dominant figure of the "rift" implies an ecological corrective that turns repeatedly back to the role of human labor, supplementing and remaking human labor with knowledge about the earth. For instance, Foster quotes as evidence the passage from Capital: "From the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation, the private property of particular individual in the earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men. Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations as boni patres

and the capitalist tendencies of "gathering" and "building" and collective flourishing, also draws us into our own insistence upon environments that are "built." Tsing's insistence on revising her first instinct of "growing" with building, marks an impulse, a reflexive relation that speaks an ambivalence about what we are *emphasizing* when we revise the qualities of mushrooms. Even as Tsing is optimistic about the possibilities of fringe capitalism, going on to elaborate a "collaborative" survival of mushrooms and humans, the interplay is no longer between "active/passive," "background/foreground," but the *complexities* of what mushrooms may be doing between the interstices of "growth," "gather," and "build" and the historicity it attempts to articulate. Treating the registration of this difference as part of our perception of landscape instead of a necessary paradigm shift.

By enabling organisms some room withdraw from our significations is not to say that I am attempting to awaken us, in the fashion of Timothy Morton, to a melancholic *ecocriticism* oriented toward structural loss or Bill McKibben who, in his dramatically titled *End of Nature*

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familias"(*164-5). I do not wish to deny Marx's sensitivity to the role of natural process in the creation of wealth, nor do I disagree with Foster that Marx offers "the very essence of the present-day notion of sustainable development,"* but I see the task fo ecocriticism as thinking against the grim productionism of *Marx,* that appears in *Capital.*

Relatedly, a definitive account also appears in Jason Moore's *Capitalism and the Web of Nature.* Moore argues that capitalism depends on nature to absorb the unwanted material effects of industry, its pollutants and wastes, and to provide an endless supply of raw material. Moore proposes that modernity can be reinterpreted as a "world ecology" that *incorporates nature* as "surplus" or "standing reserve" into its expanding "zone of appropriation." Moore argues that the difference between nature's capacity for self-replenishment and the limitless demand for capital signifies an approaching "end" to cheap nature—an "end" that does not, however, prevent the intensification of capital's appropriation of nature. In Moore's account, any discrete unit like a river flowing over rocks can become "metabolic," if it is integrated into the production of value, yet by the same token, it becomes harder to distinguish "value" from mere nature.

mourns the death of "nature" in our lifetimes.[27] On the contrary, as I will demonstrate, if as McKibben indicates, if "each of us is in some measure responsible" for destructiveness, then the experience of apprehension and "measure" very much matters. By contrast, as I will show, Romantic proto-engagements with ecology that I address in this dissertation, be it Shelley's epicurean cosmology ("Once was living man") or Rousseau's experiment in measuring *the* "barometric pressure" of the soul of Jean-Jacques, will be thought in relation to its particular attempt to think *environmental conditions*, be it conditions of exile or that of a changing earth, offer models for challenging the insistence that ecological relations must be strictly objective or "systemic." Romantic reading might offer contemporary ecologies, focused on maintaining and managing systems and networks, the liberty to generate new epistemic relations of intimacy and new "histories" to account for the mutual implication of man and nature.

Finite Actionability

Correlative to its suspicions about *language then* is the manner in environmentalism, with its emphasis on the scope and of depth of the ecological event or the precarity of systems, does not always know what to do with concerns that address us as urgent but naïve, as questions of our daily bread and breaths we take that appear *incongruous* with mere systems despite the pressures of connectedness. Romanticism's implicit preoccupation with finitude, a manner of accentuating, sometimes by *placing fanatic emphasis on* what the subject *heard, did, or saw* and its requisite impact may contribute, I propose by *making* more accessible. As Frédéric Neyrat points out, in its rush to annihilate "transcendent" positions, contemporary ecological thinking

[27] Works on mourning and the planet are too numerous to list here. But some of the recent, widely read works include Roy Scranton's *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene,* Alan Weisman's *World Without Us,*

has embraced "immanence" perhaps too readily, and at the detriment of more fruitful ways of engagement.[28] As Elizabeth Povinelli astutely observes, current models of environmentalism are absorbed by the horizon of the *event* and attempts to "decisively disrupt the current organization of the actual."[29] Yet this "decisive," often "monstrous" interruption hinges on *a* presupposed-posited investment in internal organization and the precarious, emergent "assemblages" and intensities it can generate. [30]

A "Romantic" ecocriticism, I cautiously contend, begins by thinking through the mutual implications of the two fields in the disciplinary fissures within what Romantic critics tend to call questions of "persons and things," or, what Povinelli calls the "scarred homology" between the "natural" and "critical sciences"(Povinelli 38). If ecology is typically understood as possessing a teleological orientation toward internal "organization," one that integrates vegetable, animal, and microbial life within a system or network and concretizable as infrastructure, it is also a natural science, and methodologically and conceptually linked to its more earthly epistemologies of botany, morphology, atmospheric studies, practices that have typically been understood as especially vulnerable to the adjustments of pedagogy and aesthetics, as too readily accessible to the variabilities of empirical encounter. At stake is not merely the

[28] Neyrat, Frédéric. Neyrat, Frédéric. *Atopias: Manifesto for a Radical Existentialism*. First edition. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.

[29] Povinelli, Elizabeth A. Geontologies: a Requiem to Late Liberalism. Durham, [North Carolina]: Duke University Press, 2016.

[30] By "scientific," I am a making a generic distinction between modes now classified as "poetic" or "literary," the latter emergent during the Romantic period and ones that Thomas Kuhn would attribute to "normal science," what depends on "research firmly based on one or more past scientific achievements," a self-defining archive and "community" built up where ever work supplies the "foundation for further practice"(Kuhn 10). My interest is in their sometimes overlapping archive but the different "gaze" and "effect" they have on the apprehension of knowledge.

construction of something "sensible" but a manner of reflecting upon the impact of having been made to see, as becoming one who sees. We need only to think of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who is adamant that botany is not merely nomenclature but a question of "learning to see," a pedagogy echoed in what Irigaray describes as the "cultivation of sensory perception" from within: "awaken[ing] at various levels, imperceptibly, I am brought from concentration to contemplation"(Irigaray 47). For Irigaray and Rousseau, perception is not only a place where one "sees," but one engages, activates, and fluctuates within a minute, specific history of having seen that the poetry of nomenclature especially, can mark.

I therefore agree with the editors of the *Journal for the Environmental Humanities* when they seek to inaugurate a field that "inhabit[s]" the "simultaneous space of critique and action," not by contouring ever-larger trajectories of collective action but lingering with more literary understanding of "action," the manner in which they make accessible a relation with the environment, rendering the world less rigid in its appearances.[31] Yet instead of arriving at new narratives "calibrated to the realities" of "our changing world" as the editors propose or using narratives to "recast human stories within the context of larger synergetic time frames and processes," (a mode that unsurprisingly has reinvigorated Hegelian and Marxist models of history by seemingly eliminating the charges levied against both), I propose that "critique" must be aimed at *rendering* "action" not as a concrete outcome, but as open to figural displacements, as the site of our *implication* in forms of "encounter" that may not be mappable onto biologized forms.[32]

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[31] Deborah Rose, Thom van Dooren, Matthew Chrulew, Stuart Cooke, Matthew Kearnes, and Emily O'Gorman. *Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities*. University of New South Wales, 2012. 30.

[32] A comprehensive account of Marxist environmentalist history appears in both John Bellamy Foster's *Marx and Ecology* and Jason Moore's *Capitalism and the Web of Nature,* both of which I

Becoming Implicated, Becoming Environmental

This manner of bringing an ecological practice down to earth from its cybernetic, systematizing tendencies, sees the "abstract" subject, palpable as an inexhaustible source of strength and an irresistible logic. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkeimer saw as already coming true in the first half of the twentieth century in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> Both subject and object are nullified. The abstract self, which alone confers the legal right to record and systematize, is confronted by nothing but abstract material, which has no other property than to be the substrate of that right. The equation of mind and world is finally resolved, but only in the sense that both sides cancel out. The reduction of thought to a mathematical apparatus condemns the world to be its own measure. What appears as the triumph of subjectivity, the subjection of all existing things to logical formalism, is bought with the obedient subordination of reason to what is immediately at hand (20).[33]

Drawing on Adorno and Horkeimer, my sense is that this drive to systematize, to record reflects a very desire for the perspective-less, the construction of what Frédéric Neyrat calls an "atopic" vision. [34] In this familiar passage, Adorno and Horkeimer draw out how the "nullification" of the

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draw upon intermittently throughout the dissertation. In Moore's account, any discrete unit like a river flowing over rocks can become "metabolic," if it is integrated into the production of value, yet by the same token, it becomes harder to distinguish "value" from mere nature. I think the overarching point, one that Timothy Morton makes for a different reason, is that an "ecological" view is dominated by *abstraction* and not a set of relations *inherent in nature itself.* Moore argues that capitalism depends on nature to absorb the unwanted material effects of industry, its pollutants and wastes, and to provide an endless supply of raw material. Moore proposes that modernity can be reinterpreted as a "world ecology" that *incorporates nature* as "surplus" or "standing reserve" into its expanding "zone of appropriation." Moore argues that the difference between nature's capacity for self-replenishment and the limitless demand for capital signifies an approaching "end" to cheap nature—an "end" that does not, however, prevent the intensification of capital's appropriation of nature.

[33] Horkheimer, Max. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments.* Ed. Theodor W. Adorno and Gunzelin. Schmid Noerr. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002.

[34] Foucault's discussion of the remainder proper to any representation in the *Order of the Things* is also worth reexploring*:* "But this artifice both conceals and indicates another vacancy which is, on the contrary, immediate; that of the painter and the spectator when they are looking at or composing the picture. It may be that, in this picture, as in all the representations of which it is, as it were, the

subject, this tendency to turn against the frailties of what appears all too human, manifests itself as a "logical formalism." Even as vegetal and animal elements take a "more active role" as agents that are constructing a system, be it the integration of herbs as medicine or the role of bacteria in digestion, this view erases their particularity and their accessibility and presupposes, inextricable connection with and within living systems.

If intimations of a "logical formalism" dominates ecological thinking, they do so only because, as Adorno and Horkeimer suggest, we are accustomed to thinking the "world can be its own measure." The desire to realize "larger time frames and processes" of the earth through "human" stories seeks to codify the "absence" of the "human" in *scientific perspectives, an objective aligned with objective modernity* and that denies the possibility of its reception in a more quotidian form typically received as pedagogical, lyrical, and autobiographical. In "Natural Supernaturalism," M.H. Abrams observes as a process of secularization that shifts hopes from "political revolution to the powers inherent in the human consciousness," a process that can, with an adjustment of the gaze, be read a secularizing logic that *seeks to* lay claim *to* experience by externalizing it, denying the possibility of the very reception of secular disclosure it initiates, what Abrams, referring to the secular history of the self that Wordsworth's Nature poetry

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manifest essence, the profound invisibility of what one sees is inseparable from the invisibility of the person seeing – despite all mirrors, reflections, imitations, and portraits. Around the scene are arranged all the signs and successive forms of representation; but the double relation of the representation to its model and to its sovereign, to its author as well as to the person to whom it is being offered, this relation is necessarily interrupted. It can never be present without some residuum, even in a representation that offers itself as a spectacle. In the depth that traverses the picture, hollowing it into a fictitious recess and projecting it for- ward in front of itself, it is not possible for the pure felicity of the image ever to present in a full light both the master who is representing and the sovereign who is being represented"(17).

appears to elaborate, describes as "that degree of knowledge that cumulative experience has prepared it to receive."[35] [36]

In response to modernity's totalizing reach, Romanticism has often been associated with an attempt to stay the deepening of modernity through minimizing its demands *precisely by tracing the historical "reception," of disclosures.* This is particularly visible in recent Romantic criticism in sympathy with ecocriticism, that engages with modernity by pointing out aesthetic and rhetorical strategies for its neutralization, of draining it of its energies or letting it play out as harmlessly as possible.[37] Anne-Lise François's *Open Secrets,* for instance, proposes a "recessive" mode of action detectable *within* secular modernity. In François's words, "literary experience can become—like nature itself—the site of "unspeakable sentences"—where what is made available is free of the taint of motivated exchange."[38] She identifies the Romantic tendency, not to expose the false consciousness of any interlocutor but rather to make a demands one to one, a "demand—of themselves, of the world, of their neighbors and lovers—the impossible as the very least (la moindre des choses), refusing to take it if it does not come as

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[35] Abrams, M. H. *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature.* New York: Norton, 1971. 65-67.

[36] See also François, Anne-Lise. *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008) for her description of an open secret.

[37] Here, I also look to Anahid Nersessian's excellent summary of the field—that in the revised version. Nersessian traces the divergence between François and Marjorie Levinson as a key moment in the field. Green Romanticism has come a long way since the debates between Jonathan Bate and Alan Liu, and Nersessian lays out work by Sara Guyer, Kevis Goodman, Jacques Khalip, Lily Gurton-Wachter, Amanda Goldstein, and many others none of which are overtly "ecocritical" but nevertheless The best Romantic "ecocriticism," one is often left wondering, or connecting the dots as to what this has to do with ecocriticism.

[38] François, Anne-Lise. 'Untouched by Morning/And Untouched by Noon': Succession without Sequel." *European Romantic Review*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2012, pp. 319-327.

such—as the most natural thing in the world"(François 65). Anahid Nersessian's *Utopia Limited* parses how Romantic texts can *"*mime a minimally harmful relation between human beings and a world whose resources are decidedly finite*"*(Nersessian 16). In keeping with the diminutive movements of Romanticism, my project attempts to trace an "ecological" dimension to Romantic texts in order to reinterpret "ecocriticism" more broadly as a manner of *becoming implicated,* not in self-evident modes of destructiveness but what is at issue *within* experiences of growth and displacement, exile and political change. Romanticism, I contend, reinscribes ecology as a series of minute histories in a manner that does not adhere self-evidently to biological speciation or the internal dynamics of ecosystems but that activates a disrupted *experience* of "living with," entangled with the possibility of the ecological without opening the ecological as an independent historical horizon. My method comes close to the rhetorical readings of Sara Guyer who in her readings of John Clare, stresses the way Clare's disorientation does not stage a "flattening equivalence between all of these intricate experiences. Rather, each of these experiences simultaneously reveals and generates a series of displacements—registered in experience, in poetry, and in criticism."[39] Romantic genres, I will propose in the examples that follow, begins to construct a distinct history where implicated in an environment also becomes a manner of becoming contingent*,* rendering quotidian contours of environmental "conditions" the site of histories that are accessible yet amenable to radical change.

Edenic Longings, Historical Environments

[39] Guyer, Sara Emilie. Reading with John Clare : Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism. First edition. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. 91. Hereafter cited in text.

The ecological valences of Book IX of *Paradise Lost* have been probed extensively, but rarely have Milton's stanzas been read as he explicitly intends, as a promise to sing of "all our woe," by *focusing on* "Mans first Disobedience" and the "mortal taste" of the "fruit/Of that Forbidden Tree."[40] For Milton, the Edenic environment comes to be at stake in the difficult question of becoming implicated in the fall, of having entered into relations *with nature* through a "wound" that is not ours:

> So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
> Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat:
> Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
> Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
> That all was lost…
> …for Eve
> Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else regarded
> such delight till then, as seem'd,
> In Fruit she never tasted, whether true
> Or fansied so" (IX 780-4).[41]

If we look, not at the contours of the Edenic myth but first and foremost at Milton's narrative, *becoming implicated in the "loss" of Paradise, its knowledge,* involves a series of displacements that lessen and divert the anticipated impact of action. Eve's transgression, the overreach of the human hand and appetite, are marked by the "sighing" of "Nature" that becomes "signs" of "woe," where the passage from expression within "nature" to address to man is marked by the literal alteration of a letter. The two moments, joined by a single "now," sees the "wound" become part of the experience of the fall not despite, but within the ambiguities of Eve's

[40] These iconic lines form Book IX have been combed over many times. Ken Hiltner in *Milton and Ecology*, for example reads the wound not as a "striking" *of* the earth by humanity but humanity's being "struck from" the earth, a wound that enables us to feel and seek to repair the wound of our ancestors. Also see also perspectives by Denise Kellsey McColley, Andrew Mattison on the temporality of the garden, Tom Cohen's recent article "" that discusses reading Milton's. A

[41] Milton, John, and Gordon Teskey. *Paradise Lost: Authoritative Text, Sources and Backgrounds, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. Print.

"Intent," her becoming blind to all but "pleasure" and "taste," fancied or sensual and the difficulty of separating its legibility from the act of reading Milton itself.[42] As Luce Irigaray reminds us, difference is not merely a question of codifying the terms of an existing relation, but a "manner of entering into a relationship" with an "other" or many others.[43] This question of the "wound," of Eve's blind focus on "pleasure," also reintroduces questions about the specificity of "*Man's* First Disobedience." Adam's subsequent partaking of the fruit comes to appear not so much about a preference for a domestic relations over the paternal, for appetite over law, but the entangled, sexual and sexuate (gendered) nature of choice itself seeming to arise from a wound, from which this sexuate "nature" arose, of choosing while knowing that Eve has chosen. The significance of becoming *implicated in the fall occurs, then,* through the epistemological "map" of the fall itself, that appears as a series of shifts, unraveling a commitment to theological realities and revelation, and becoming reflective of the entangled experience of a decision arising from a *sexuate,* acquisitive past and that colors our *sense of the earth as somehow there for the taking*. The *shift* here is most palpable within our pleasurable, grammatical and poetic becoming of "he" or "she" and concerns, within our recognition of its interplay, the awareness of having

[42] In her work *Unclaimed Experience,* Cathy Caruth theorizes a figure of a "wound" that cannot be fully known except as a "voice" issues from the wound. Caruth writes in the "Afterward" to her 2016 edition: "The voice of address, the appeal to be heard and to respond, emerges from the point at which the exhalation of the wind or moan—turns into articulate sound, at the moment when the voice *just begins* to speak. The voice, passing between death and life, wind and speech, gains its power to address at the point that it is not owned by anyone, at the moment when it turns between what has not been and what is not quite yet speech, between what yearns to be told and what is not quite yet a story." I first began thinking t through the split between an earthly perspective and the poetic voice through her model of trauma. Caruth's wording lets us see the special place of the poetic voice, the voice of address, that does not say more but perhaps less, by marking a point of turning between desire and narrative, between *earthly* and the very gesture of speaking that would ventriloquize and turn away from the earth as other.

[43] Irigaray, Luce. "Why Cultivate Difference? Toward a Culture of Two Subjects." *Paragraph*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2002, pp. 79-9

already chosen. These shifts attune us to the uncertainty in the figure of choice itself, the sexual nature of choice that already addresses us in the very possibility of choosing, noting how the world is not only there for appetite but marked by our ambiguously appetitive tastes and our mortality. To *perceive a choice is already to be* implicated in taste and not mere eating, an implication that also grants the Earth a degree of accessibility, marked by the reach of Eve's hand, within the "shifts" registered.[44]

How do we linger with what Milton attempts, that is to say, his manner of brining an implicating permissibility to our engagements irreducible to the mysterious "free will" of Eve or of blind appetite itself? If Romanticism is said to be the *legacy* of Milton, this project captures a surprisingly "ecological" aspect of this literary-historical formation. The authors in this dissertation, James Hutton, William Wordsworth, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Percy Bysshe Shelley *each can be said to articulate an "environment,"* that does not fall along the binary *biologizing lines between life/nonlife* or mere "cybernetic" connectedness but each finds themselves becoming implicated in an "ecology." Each of them appears exemplary of what Godwin begins to suggest in his "literary" history, that *shifts* of a "grain of sand" palpable in its evocation, reliant upon a *sense of an experience articulated,* can differ *drastically* from material conditions we draw from it. James Hutton's 1788 *Theory of the Earth,* in its rigorous formality

[44] See Sara Guyer's comments about *displacements of experience* in environments. She writes: "The Flitting," Clare suggests that leaving—and losing—his home also allowed him to see the world anew, to recognize ivy, woodbine, and grass, not in their locality and specificity, but in their creeping excess, ubiquity, and survival, in their uncomfortable combination of resilient attachment and nonbelonging. This is not simply the substitution of one sort of love and attachment for another, but rather, one experience of nonbelonging and homelessness for another. And this means that what is at stake in thinking about homelessness is not reducible to enclosure or madness or nativism, to debt, the rise and decline of American industrialism, or pervasive inequality. It also invites us to take this feral condition, which Clare shows us is tied up with poetry, as the source of another way of thinking about romanticism and its legacies."

can be said to elaborate a "geological" perspective by dislodging an eschatological understanding. Yet far from an apocalyptic encounter, Hutton initiates a pedagogical course that sees in the movement of *minerals* the markers of an ongoing exposure to unperceived historical difference. Alternatively, Wordsworth's emphasis on a poetics of familiarity, at once activates and exploits the rationalizing discourses associated with modernity but never divulges a teleological movement toward modernity, reconstituting the present instead as a unimaginable transformations. Rousseau's *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* enacts a *désoeuvrement* of the *Second Discourse,* continuing its work by rereading his dislodging of teleological *history* as the "experience" of Jean-Jacques. Promising to measure the "movements" of his "soul," Rousseau traces, not the persecution of past enemies or his responses to them but the peculiar, unexpected *grammar of* what he "would have wanted" and "might have done." These musings are not what the past offers up to the present but simultaneously assertions about and *responses* to the past that begins to contour a surprisingly contingent, liberating present. Finally, in Percy Shelley's 1813 romance *Queen Mab,* tracing the expanding scope of imperial conquest ironically reinvigorates a particulate, Epicurean histories marked by assertions of what "once was" that also signify the interruptions of "chance" legible within every demarcation of geography, generating profusions of likenesses between "man" and "nature," that render revolutionary transformations within the "nature of things" thinkable.

The Anthropocene and Romantic History

Lastly, I want to take up the question of Paul Crutzen's proposal for a new geological epoch, "the Anthropocene," defined by carbon activity from man, a proposal that generated enthusiastic responses in critical theory, responses that varyingly embrace, contest, or otherwise qualify its nomenclature. Crutzen traces the onset of the Anthropocene to the late eighteenth

century, recasting the period loosely construed as "Romantic," as the inauguration of a new climate epoch.[45] At stake provisionally, then, is also the question of a Romantic history and the desire and space for Romantic writing to articulate its own historicity in a newly inaugurated era of "carbon-based" histories. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his *Four Theses,* theorizes the joining of natural and human history in the period "from 1750s to now" observing that never in "the period since the Enlightenment was there ever any awareness of the geological agency that human beings were acquiring at the same time as and through processes closely linked to their acquisition of freedom."[46] The question becomes, then, how do we configure this "non-awareness" and the "acquisition of freedom" and does it constitute anything like a "geological agency"?

The *Anthropocene,* for Chakrabarty, recasts the post-Enlightenment subject as one who does not sufficiently grasp the physical (geological) dimension of their social conduct, a kind of "agency" that only present research brings to light. This manner of negation-integration attributed to that binds the past to its unfolding revives the *Spirit* of world history even as Chakrabarty equivocates about Hegel's influence.[47] When Chakrabarty proposes, through an

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[45] Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg argue in their influential essay "The Geology of Mankind: A critique of the Anthropocene Narrative"(*The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 62-69.) that the carbon economy reshaped capitalism from the eighteenth century onward. Malm and Hornborg critique proponents of the Anthropocene for their tendency to "naturalize" the problem of climate change. Atmospheric warming, they argue, begins in social organization and materializes through nonhuman nature.

[46] See Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." Critical Inquiry, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197-222. 208

[47] As Chakrabarty himself admits, this type of thinking is heavily indebted to Hegelian dialectics. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* Hegel distinguishes the human from the animal though the human capacity, not only to be solicited by external things, but to realize historical relations between things. The strength of the Hegelian dialectic is that it frees the subject from what is immediately given, but alternatively, it reconstitutes the subject through its explicit dependency on the *realization of a totality of historical relations,* leaving vegetative, animal, and often ethnic life *dependent on their*

unusual reading of Walter Benjamin, that "an emergent, new universal history of humans that flashes up in the moment of the *danger* that is climate change." Yet unlike Benjamin, Chakrabarty never quite engages *with the manner in which Benjamin already forgoes the "collective."* Chakrabarty contends that climate "poses for us a question of a human collectivity, an us, pointing to a *figure* of the universal that escapes our capacity to experience the world"(221-2). He renews the Hegelian proposal of a *historical horizon, this* time ecologically configured, drawn from a deep historical reality reflective of a "human collectivity." Yet despite drawing on Benjamin, Chakrabarty's longing for what "escapes our capacity to experience the world" however, *expresses* a more quotidian understanding. Benjamin consistently reiterates, that the *negative* can be intensely personal and specific even as it opens onto past and future generations: "There is happiness—such as could arouse envy in us [das Neid in uns erwecken könnte]—only in the air we have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, the idea of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the idea of redemption."[48] [49] Tempering Friedrich Nietzsche's *amor fati,* Benjamin places

"participation" in forms of injustice. Hegelian dialectic forms the backbone of many ecocritical perspectives that *embrace on the level of theory* what occurs on the level of planetary infrastructure, a fundamental misrecognition of power as *either purely physical* or *purely cognitive,* and not as a *historical formation*. Hegelian sublation does not merely include nature in social relations, but in re-defining vegetative life in relation to a totality of relations, eliding the often violent terms of inclusion itself. This is less an attempt to salvage "essence" or "substance" based understandings of nature, but to assess what is at stake in Hegel's attempt to dispense with problems of substance and essence.

[48] See Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. Ed. Harry Zohn and Hannah Arendt. First Mariner Books edition. Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019. 197.

[49] See also Amanda Goldstein's reading of Walter Benjamin's "messianic air" in Goldstein, Amanda Jo. *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life.* (The University of Chicago Press, 2017). She writes: "But through the second thesis's questions, which move from the thought of air that will have touched both past and present beings, to the citation of the past in present speech, to unacknowledged or unapprehended (familial) relations, Benjamin arrives at the notion of "weak messianic power." Here "power," it turns out, sounds more like a slight susceptibility, a mundane

emphasis on what "could arouse envy in us," the mundanely missed encounters. What escapes our experience of the world, Benjamin suggests, is precisely what contours our "capacities" for experience, where durability of generations of "air" *is* sustained by the fact that we could have breathed it to *slightly differently, or even to the same effect.* If we were to *speak,* according to Chakrabarty, about what the 1750s until now "missed," we would have to adjust the very concept of "geological agency," tethering it to the dull interchange of carbon in the breaths taken and the histories they accumulate.

If Romanticism is typically read as absorbed by its historicity and articulating its relation *to the past,* attending to this tendency is a *"critique" of any structural* designation of "behavior," pattern, and tendency that tends toward an *abstract anthropology* and with it the *force* that must be received. Paul de Man in his essay "Wordsworth and Hölderlin," describes Romanticism as "*our* past precisely to the extent that we are beings who want to be defined, and as such, interpreted in relation to a totality of experiences that slip into the past."[50] [51] As de Man suggests, Romanticism articulates a historiographic desire, a tendency toward finitude that divulges itself as investments made in things spoken or silent and the capacity of language to pose as a question what precisely happened. Here, various manners through which "what happened" comes to be transformable into liberating relations of "having been" or "would have been." What I attempt to

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being claimed or spoken for that has less to do with the perspective of angels for which the theses are famous than with the fact of having had expectant parents…the overlapping time of terrestrial generations and their (missed) happiness are aligned with the historical materialist's antiteleological, constructivist, and constellating intuition, and against progressive historicism's triumphal procession of victors' history."

[50] For more on the concept of the "untimeliness" of Romanticism, see also the introduction to by Jacques Khalip, *Anonymous Life : Romanticism and Dispossession* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009). and Cynthia Chase's introduction to *Romanticism* (London: Longman, 1993).

[51] De Man, Paul. The Rhetoric of Romanticism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. 20.

draw out, then, is a manner of receiving that Carl Schmitt complains *as* "occasionalist" or taking "everything as an occasion," where the proliferation of "conditionals" that dislodge, to some extent, the imposition of the burden of the abstractly social and to render the world *more accessible,* less concrete and totalizing.

This historiographical desire, I propose, is *also an ecological* one. As writers like Rachel Carson and Robert Nixon remind us, environmentality *depends upon its perception and its reception.* In his excellent *Slow Violence* Robert Nixon reminds us that much of ecological violence is slow, "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[52] Here, Nixon blurs the line between "potential" violence and *actual violence,* a difference that hinges on disintegrating perceptual layers and the experiences they would seem to assert. Romanticism, then, keeps alive the paradoxical way the manner of "becoming implicated" this drive toward realization also initiates, in coming after can provisionally become a manner of diminishing, lightening, that assert provisional forms of access owing to its "impact," that persist *beyond a constricting, structuralizing impulse.* Such a Romanticism, marked by the *calm* after the vertiginous event and often described as "pastoral" or "pedagogical," as circumscribing, rendering provisional the universalizing *claim* over the production of the physical nature of things. William Wordsworth's 1802 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* praises science for the latitude it affords "pleasure":

> We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. The Man of science, the Chemist and Mathematician, whatever difficulties and disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. However painful may be the

[52] Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011. 2.

> objects with which the Anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge (*LB* 105).[53]

In articulating the intertwined fates of "science" and "poetry," Wordsworth subtly echoes Milton by foregrounding the aspect of scientific "principles" that do not enable us to seize upon, or determine our relations *with* objects, but that "exist[s] in us" and are verified by pleasure alone. Wordsworth's preoccupation with pleasure appears at odds with scientific disciplines that prizes "difficulty" in inquiry, in that he subtly undermines the very pursuit of epistemic privilege that we find rewarding. Yet by proposing "where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge," Wordsworth also proposes knowledge is not only separable from objects but marked itself by this separability and release. This libidinal teleology is nevertheless more complex; "disgust" and "pain" connect us not to objects per se, but the texture and manner of something's accessibility through the myriad of varieties through which they can withdraw are inextricable from our manner of having struggled*,* in "know[ing] and feel[ing] this," Wordsworth suggests, one "becomes" a chemist or anatomist. After Wordsworth, we might say that poetic *pleasure* comprises a surprising response to what Nixon calls the "the challenge of *visibility"* that makes space *for what eludes* the scientist-environmentalist, and paradoxically, what *renders the objects of science* provisionally available, accessible to poetic speech (Nixon 5).

[53] See Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802*. Ed. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Fiona J. Stafford. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

CHAPTER ONE: BECOMING MINERAL IN HUTTON'S SYSTEMS

….There is a secret known
To thee and to none else of living things
Which may transfer the sceptre of wide heaven,
The fear of which perplexes the
Supreme…

—P.B. Shelley. *Prometheus Unbound.*[54]

It's not very difficult—I mean, you can hear the grass creak…. And you can see that it's a process of attrition that's gone on for a long time and that organic nature is being replaced through the agency of the psychozootic power, whatever one might call them, i.e., us—it's being replaced by something else, by chemistry, dust, and stones, which function in some form or other. And we don't know what it's going to be. On the whole, the thing evolves under its own steam. There's very little we can do to steer it.

—W.G. Sebald. *The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W.G. Sebald.*[55]

I began contemplating this chapter by thinking through the purpose of the recent revival of interest in the geological in the humanities, of the set of concerns that inform the new intersections between the humanities and the sciences we seek to articulate. The elaboration of a "geological dimension" to "species activity" arises, certainly from the impact of human activity on the climate, but also from the projected legibility of human activity in earth's mineral strata. New studies in geological reject "imperceptibility," urging instead the manner in which the human has "become" a "geological" presence, fixing our gaze on the geological impact of increased consumption and production. In some ways, this narrative of humans "becoming geological," appears to repeat what becoming "biological" once constituted, a manner of fixing

[54] Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 2001. 260.

[55] Sebald, W. G, *The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W.G. Sebald*. Ed. Lynne Sharon. Schwartz. A Seven Stories Press 1st ed. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2007. 102.

"destiny" to its legibility as natural inscription. Taken as the father of "gradualism," Hutton would appear to be the villain of this new drama, providing false assurances of an earth eternally stable and present, *contributing, by his very obliviousness, to* an earth altered by human activity. In turning to *Theory of the Earth,* I attempt to elaborate, not so much a defense of gradualism, but a Romantic understanding of what thinking "systems" involves, an understanding mostly lost to the discipline geological science, and that minimizes and diminishes the pull of what Elizabeth Povinelli calls the "carbon imaginary," or the "eternal desert" where the difference between "life" and "nonlife" is codified.

I make the case for thinking through Hutton's conscious construction of a pedagogical geological system by anchoring the perception in the "imperceptibility" of process. The "imperceptibility" of a system, I argue, cuts two ways. First, the vicissitudes of earthly living for Hutton, would be a manner of neutralizing, even as it subtly accommodates the impulse toward revelatory thinking and I contend, the "carbon imaginary" that displaces divine revelation in the contemporary imagination of "life." Thinking geologically exhibits a certain resistance to eschatology by seizing upon the banal exposures to continuity "systematicity" yields, opening the continuity of human life to an interval that is neither *determined* by judgment nor *fixed* by the origins of creation. Second, thinking systematically for Hutton does not seek to attain the divine by *installing the "absence"* of human participation in revelation. He circulates a "humanizing pedagogy," one that emphasizes the amenability and the accessibility of the earth's surface to a reading that does not guarantee of history's inalterable face, but by the minimizing capacities of *human reason.*

Beyond Gradualism?

In his famous article popularizing the nomenclature of the Anthropocene, Paul Crutzen writes:

> Unless there is a global catastrophe — a meteorite impact, a world war or a pandemic — mankind will remain a major environmental force for many millennia. A daunting task lies ahead for scientists and engineers to guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene. This will require appropriate human behaviour at all scales, and may well involve internationally accepted, large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance to 'optimize' climate. At this stage, however, we are still largely treading on *terra incognita*.[56]

Geological evidence encourages us to see the future as "scientists and engineers" do. The "human," Crutzen proposes, has become an "environmental force," one that is destructive but amenable to "sustainable management."[57] While a "meteorite impact, a world war or a pandemic" might lift the burden of management, the continuation of life depends on ambitious geo-engineering projects that optimize the processes of the earth and the composition of the atmosphere to sustain the human species. Crutzen proposes, intriguingly, that the "geology" now addresses us through our interruptive impact on and of the carbon cycle.

Thinking "geological process" especially in relation to the "carbon cycle" has mesmerized ecocriticism fascinated by the *figure of the human who comes to be determined by the* material deposits they will leave behind. Clare Colebrook proposes, for instance, that the

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[56] Crutzen, Paul J. "Geology of Mankind." *Nature*, vol. 415, no. 6867, 2002, p 23.

[57] Here, it is useful to examine: Malm, Andreas, and Alf Hornborg. "The Geology of Mankind? A Critque of the Anthropocene Narrative." The Anthropocene Review, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 62-69. Malm and Hornburg argue that the carbon economy reshaped capitalism from the eighteenth century onward, and that the Anthropocene's narrow focus on species naturalizes the social dynamics that have led to the intensification of the carbon economy. See also: Andreas. *Fossil Capital: the Rise of Steam-Power and the Roots of Global Warming.* London: Verso, 2016. Malm makes a compelling case for tracing fossil fuel use instead of carbon activity in manner that closely tracks the rise of capitalism.

"hyper-consuming," "self-universalizing human," swims into view in the current stratification of the earth.[58] Donna Haraway observes that "fossil burning humans beings" will be "read in the strata of the rocks on the land and under the waters by the geologists of the very near future, if not already"(Haraway 46). Even Alan Weisman's bestselling book *The World Without Us* ruminates how humans did not need to "wait until fossilization to enter geological time," that by "tapping the Carboniferous Formation and spewing it up into the sky, we've become a volcano that hasn't stop erupting since the 1700s."[59] The manner in which becoming "mineral," reflects and inflects a position that is peculiarly "post-human," coming into focus for the "geologists of the future" as humans fixed by their rate of becoming mineral, their transformability into "carboniferous" formations.

Alternatively, for other critics, these mineralogical transformations proper to the figure of the "new human" do not so much orient us toward extinction but concretize the future of the human in the mineral but colonizes the understanding of the present by *subtending daily life* with potentially impact of carboniferous transformations. Challenging the "gradualist orthodoxy" of geology, eco-theorists stress way *geos now* penetrates the perceptive field of the quotidian, informing its different *rhythms and expressions.* As Nigel Clark and Kathryn Yusoff point out in their introduction to their special issue on *Geosocial Formations and the Anthropocene*:

> Most perturbingly, the emerging geoscience post-gradualism of the last half century has brought the temporalities, intensities and magnitudes of geologic processes into the patterns and durations of everyday human life. Not simply back on the agenda, the 'revolutions of the earth' that haunted Hegel, Kant and their contemporaries are now supported by models, metrics and predictions. And in this way, the time of the earth –

[58] See, in addition to Colebrook's contribution to the Special Issue edited by Nigel Clark and Kathryn Yusoff, her work on Deleuze and Paul de Man. Colebrook takes up the orientation of Romantic texts and Deleuzian aesthetics *toward extinction* and the possibility of thinking subjectivity *beyond extinction* as a way from detaching from our commitments to life.

[59] See Weisman, Alan. The World without Us. New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2007.

> evolutionary, glacial, epochal – potentially outruns the tempo of collective decision-making, sociotechnical innovation, even cultural expression. If it is understandable in such situations that critical-analytic social thought should defend its terrain, so too are we in urgent need of more speculative and less orthodox modes of inquiry.[60]

Yusoff and Clark imagines the Anthropocenic subject juggling different temporalities, switching between evolutionary and the epochal. In bringing the "intensities" and "magnitudes" of the carbon cycle into everyday life, they echo Barbara Adam who in her *Timescapes of Modernity,* imagines the modern subject as dwelling amidst a "multitude of coordinated environmental and internal rhythms," activities "not only organized and planned but also timed and synchronized at varying speeds and intensity." [61] Yet there seems something slightly peculiar about speculating about the manner in which "geological processes" will potentially intrude *into* our lives by disrupting our everyday activities, when erosion and seismic activities comprised a regular aspect of life before we had technologies to measure them*,* and earthquakes have, perhaps, always *interrupted* the temporalities of "sovereign decision-making." In order to address new concerns about the relation between "everyday human life*,"* and the "geological," it is necessary to clarify what Yusoff and Clark concede, that thinking geological processes have historically been "speculative," and only recently have we felt the pressure to *coordinate* and re-orient geological processes toward the possibility of a geological event. Indeed it is only from the perspective of capitalism's *long durée* that geological discourse, concerned with elaborating the structure, substance, and processes of the earth, becomes reified in relations of production and

[60] Clark, Nigel, and Yusoff, Kathryn. "Geosocial Formations and the Anthropocene." *Theory, Culture, and Society.* January, 2017. Vol 34, Issue 2-3, pp. 3 – 23. 4.

[61] Adam, Barbara. *Timescapes of Modernity: the Environment and Invisible Hazards.* London: Routledge, 1998. 13.

consumption.[62] "Geology" becomes "geohistory," Jason Moore observes, when geological deposition becomes the history of industrial power: "Geology, in other words, co-produces power and production as it bundles with historically specific human relations. These specific relations, including geology, undergo successive transformations."[63]

This alarming intrusion of "geological processes" appears less as an unprecedented moment in history, than a kind of incompatibility geological study has always exhibited vis-à-vis the thinking to which Hegel's and Kant's names are typically attached. [64] Hutton's *Theory draws upon* observations about glaciers and mineral deposits in the late Holocene, the period that Crutzen identifies as drawing to a close in the end of the eighteenth century and demarcating an epochal shift to the Anthropocene. It is fitting, then, that we look again at this period of *pivoting* from the Holocene to the Anthropocene without the presupposition of a Kantian or a Hegelian perspective and looking instead to the radical repercussions that Hutton's concept of "imperceptibility" introduces. If "humanity" as a "force" inheres in the proliferation and acceleration of carboniferous transformations, Hutton has little interest in what humans can become. Instead, he defines humanity through the *imperceptibility of* geological processes that must be *dislodged* from a sovereign perspective, but nevertheless does not foreclose the

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[62] As I have begun to outline in the introduction, Marxist and Hegelian histories inform much of our interest in the Anthropocene. John Bellamy Foster demonstrated in his *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* the particular "socioeconomic" point of view of nature proper to Capital: "From the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation, the private property of particular individual in the earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men. Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations as boni patres familias"(164-5)

[63] Moore, Jason W. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital.* 1st Edition. New York: Verso, 2015. 122.

[64] For more on Kant and Hegel and geology, see Frodeman, Robert. Geo-Logic: Breaking Ground between Philosophy and the Earth Sciences. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. Print

possibility of relation *with revelation.* In his *Theory of the Earth,* he articulates an *alternative to the carbon imaginary* by anchoring mineralogical thinking the pedagogical and archival impulses of deciphering the earth's surface and its subterranean composition. It may seem unorthodox to turn to a "gradualist" theory of geological processes that balances the elaboration of a heightened, formal system, all the while deflating its efficacy by lapsing into the reassurances about the continuity of "life." James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth*, a work that exemplifies a mode of theorization that more or less disappears after the Napoleonic Wars, reemerges as relevant precisely because it turns its focus away from the pressure to realize *the geological event and* its apocalyptic formations. Like his contemporaries, Hutton aims to raise the "Book of Nature" to an object of study in its own right, dislodging theories of the earth" from their dependency upon the events of Genesis. Perhaps already discernible in Hutton's imprecise prose and the sheer length of the meandering argument Hutton eventually unfolds, are the assertions of "imperceptibility*"* that *loosens* the very *history* .

Hutton & Cuvier

Before retracing aspects of Hutton's *argument,* I would first like to lay out what is at stake in theorizing a "habitable" earth for Hutton by introducing. atemporal epistemic unfolding that is distinct from the contemporary tendency to abstract the requirements of species life. Hutton first presented his *Theory of the Earth* as a paper to the Royal Society, followed by an amended version in 1788 that directly addresses the Society's immediate criticisms, as well as an expanded, two-volume version in 1795 containing more references to fieldwork. Eighteenth century study of the earth was predominantly divided between the rigorously practical examination of mineral deposits for their industrial use, and the predominantly theological,

deciphering the appearance of surface of the earth, its topographical features, for signs of the creation and the deluge. Developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under the aegis of Christian theology, the genre "theory of the earth" is perhaps best exemplified by Thomas Burnet's influential work *The Sacred Theory of the Earth.*[65] The frontispiece of Burnet's opus strings together the successive surfaces of the earth in an eschatological map, passing from prelapserian Eden to the restoration of Paradise.[66] Burnet's illustrations emanate with a sense of assurance, as if the *revelatory nature of eschatology could be traced and retraced,* and having already to some extent been realized in the contours of topography, undermines the very understanding of "last things," or judgment.

By the time James Hutton presented his discoveries to the Royal Society in 1785, geological thought on the continent—lead by Abraham Gottlob Werner in Freiburg—had generally abandoned attempts to theorize a system of the earth. Werner and his students focused on the forces responsible for rock formations and attempted to import the taxonomic practices of botany to the mineral kingdom.[67] While Hutton, like Burnet, approaches the earth *as* what must be

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[65] For extensive accounts of Thomas Burnet's influence on William Blake and William Wordsworth, see in addition to Noah Herringman's *Romantic Rocks,* Wyatt, John Frederick. *Wordsworth and the Geologists.* Cambridge, [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995. & Hutchings, Kevin D. *Imagining Nature: Blake's Environmental Poetics.* Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

[66] Burnet, Thomas. *The Sacred Theory of the Earth.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965. Also see Stephen Jay Gould's chapter on Thomas Burnet in *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

[67] For more on the Wernerian school and Neptunism, see Rachel Laudan's *From Mineralogy to Geology : The Foundations of a Science*. Relevant here are also the strides made in geological study in England by John Whitehurst, an early member of the Lunar Society and responsible for his influential theory of geological strata and insights into the formation of coal from vegetable matter. Whitehurst published *An Inquiry into the Original State and Formation of the Earth* in 1778, just before Hutton' *Theory of the Earth.*

"opened up and read" (1788, 220), he positions himself as a practitioner of Enlightenment science who explicitly rejects "reasoning fantastically, or…making gratuitous supposition founded merely on imagination." Such imagination, he proposes, is the province of the natural philosopher "before the age of science." Hutton's implicit contention is that the "age of science" *displaces,* therefore opens up interstices and points of movement between "observation" and "fiction," and this distinction as a *historical one.* Frustrated with Burnet's conjectures, Hutton dismisses *Scared Geology* as mere "poetic fiction of a golden age" (1795, 307). [68] If theorizing the earth in the "age of science" must distinguish itself from "poetic fiction," its assurances for the stability of the earthly life, assurances that in any case may be redundant to a faithful reader, theoretically risks exposing eschatology and revelation to points of contestation. Uninterested in challenging revelation yet acknowledging that "science" risks becoming "poetic fiction," Hutton distinguishes one from the other not on the basis of visual evidence but on a theory that does not need to *refer* consistently to eschatology.

Hutton's manner of engaging with habitability, I contend, contrasts sharply with the "earth" of Georges Cuvier, one that is unequivocally oriented *toward the event of extinction*. I rather think that Cuvier, not Hutton, is the index for contemporary geological thinking insofar as he is invested in a position that is "post-life." If Hutton attempts to distinguish *geological study* from mere "poetic fiction," the importance of this particular distinction I propose, comes into focus if we contrast Hutton's theory of the earth with the understanding of earthly life advanced by Georges Cuvier. Cuvier famously demarcates a point of transition in Foucault's theory

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[68] Hutton, James. *Theory of the Earth*, with Proofs and Illustrations. In two volumes. H. R. Engelmann (J. Cramer); Hafner Pub. Co, 1959.

between the spatialized mode of "natural history" and the "history of nature."[69] Although I hesitate to rely on Foucault's theory entirely, there is little doubt that for Cuvier, the key distinction is not between *poetry* and *science,* but between *history* and *life.*

Georges Cuvier is not strictly speaking a geologist, yet he appends a "Discourse Préliminaire" to the 1812 version of his *Ossemens fossils* in order to distinguish his method of comparative anatomy from "theories of the earth" carried away by fancy.[70] Though Cuvier largely dismisses eschatological arguments drawn from the appearance of the earth, he leans heavily upon Christian geology of Swiss naturalist Jean-André De Luc and his theory of successive "revolutions." By stressing "extinction," however, Cuvier rethinks the very meaning of revolution. In fact, looking to Diderot's *Encyclopédie* entry reminds us that "revolution" did not always connote "sudden" or "violent" change (the use of "revolution" in the natural sciences for the first half of the eighteenth century was primarily in astronomy), and that Cuvier's appeal for poets like Shelley and Byron and novelists like Flaubert and George Sand, stems precisely from his contributions to altering the natural-scientific vernacular, including the emancipatory and violent resonances through which political "revolution" could be understood. [71]

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[69] See in relation to Foucault's description of Cuvier, Goodman, Kevis "Conjectures on Beachy Head: Charlotte Smith's Geological Poetics and the Ground of the Present." *ELH*, vol. 81 no. 3, 2014, pp. 983-1006. Goodman observes that Foucault's division between "temporal" and "spatial" perhaps overdetermines lines of inquiry, and I definitely agree. I think here, though, Foucault identifies rightly what we inherit from Cuvier.

[70] Robert Jameson's 1813 translation, widely circulated and responsible for the popularization of Cuvier's theory in England, remains the most referenced for historians of science working in English. But Jameson's translation contains key divergences from and elisions of Cuvier's phrasing. Instead, I am using the Martin Rudwick's translation which is, in its vernacular and lexicon, much closer to Cuvier's French original. I reference the original French when I think there are terminological differences that are important.

[71] For more on Cuvier's influence on Romantic writers, see, in addition to Noah Herringman's *Romantic Rocks*, Peacocke, Emma. *Romanticism and the Museum*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan,

In his skeletal reconstructions of large mammals and his compelling proofs of the possibility of species extinction, Cuvier understands himself to be engaged in a hitherto unknown task. He sees himself as a "new species of antiquarian" that "decipher[s]" fragments and "reconstruct[s] the ancient beings to which these fragments belonged"(Cuvier 167). Yet Cuvier's posture of historic objectivity is somewhat deceptive. His technique of comparative anatomy is a technique of temporal differentiation that not only re-composes fragments but dates them. The possibility of extinction temporally cleaves the earth, consigning the "life" of "fossilized remains" to a *different time,* severed from the future, and reconstrues a future that becomes itself dictated by the possibility of extinction. In his "Discourse Préliminaire," Cuvier places the geological observer, a kind of figure for Cuvier himself, within an "encounter" *with* the spatialization of time:

> When a traveler crosses fertile plains, where the regular course of tranquil rivers sustains abundant vegetation, and where the land—crowded with numerous people and ornate with flourishing villages, rich cities, and superb monuments—is never disturbed unless by the ravages of war or by the oppression of powerful men, he is not tempted to believe that nature has also had its civil wars, and that the surface of the globe has been upset by successive revolutions and various catastrophes. But these ideas change as soon as he seeks to excavate this ground that today is so peaceful, or to climb onto the hills that border the plain. His ideas enlarge, as it were, with his viewpoint. They begin to encompass the extent and magnitude of these ancient events, as soon as he climbs the higher chains of which the [foot]hills cover the flanks, or as he penetrates into their interior, following downward ward the beds of the torrents (183).

Cuvier does not propose that the earth is specifically created for life but begins in the midst of a scene of life. For Cuvier, nature's "revolutions" and "catastrophes" enter into observation through the "metaphors" of upheaval in the body politic. Here, the "intestine wars" of nature

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2015, and Oerlemans, Onno. *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

intrude upon the scene not by physically interrupting civic life but through an invisible, unsuspected correspondence with what is a deep history—the "disturbance" of war and tyranny. The correspondence that Cuvier discovers, we begin to see, is not with what is explicitly present—life on the surface—but with a violent history that the "subterranean" figures. Here, I do not wish to overemphasize correspondences between natural and civil life, yet I do wish to bring out a manner of reading "surface life" that poses as a question life's traumatic past in the very phrase "he is not tempted to believe." Subterranean processes, by their very existence, retrace a past that corresponds to the surface by subtending it with an invisible history. For Cuvier, reading a correspondence with life is deeply embedded in the very act of anatomical reconstruction, where "bodily" organization and its calcification balances "life" with its incomprehensible, catastrophic disruption. [72]

As Cuvier's earthly traveler ascends, he discovers signs of displacement owing to the rising and retreating sea, natural movements that have left the remains of marine animals scattered among the skeletons of land inhabitants. For Cuvier, the interaction between land and sea can only be violent, an encounter whose movements are not gradual but sudden and incomprehensible. Appealing to the preservation of skin, hair, and flesh that would have decomposed unless preservation occurred immediately after death, Cuvier theorizes:

> Thus life on earth has often been disturbed by terrible events: calamities ties which initially perhaps shook the entire crust of the earth to a great depth, but which have since become steadily less deep and less general. Living organisms without number have been the victims of these catastrophes. Some were destroyed by deluges, others were left dry

[72] See Rudwick's biography of Cuvier in *Bursting the Limits of Time: the Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution.* Cuvier's naturalist is not only a source of poetic inspiration but indicates a biographical reading of Cuvier's own life and the "revolutionary powers" that enables him to become a naturalist in the first place. For Cuvier, the overturning of the existing bureaucracy enabled his own career at the *Muséum Nationale* where he arrived in 1795 following the excesses of the Reign of Terror. Yet I am less interested in the biographical resonances here than the formulation of "subterranean" and "geological" processes not as separate from but essential to civil life.

> when the seabed was suddenly raised; their races are even finished forever, and all they leave in the world is some debris that is hardly recognizable to the naturalist.
>
> Such are the consequences to which the objects we encounter at every step necessarily lead, and that we can verify at every moment in almost every land. These great and terrible events are clearly imprinted everywhere, where, for the eye that knows how to read history in their monuments. But what is still more astonishing, and no less certain, is that life has not always existed on the globe, and that it is easy for the observer to recognize the point at which it began to deposit its products (190).

To see in the remains of organisms a terrifying event, to speculate on the manner of their death, *is* for Cuvier, to imagine a drama of victims and catastrophes. Echoes of the Mosaic Flood are certainly present in his observations. Yet rather than cyphers of divine power, the bundling of geological event and Biblical exegesis *enables* the geological to mark, more than "process," but what *intrudes into life.* Cuvier's earthly traveler, drawn into the abyss of time, discovers in the calcareous sediment the traces of a distinct passage from sea to land, that is not a living one but the memory of the catastrophe of life. Life, Cuvier reminds us, "has not always existed," introducing to us to a separate history of its *nonexistence* "at the point at which it began to deposit its products"— where a *different history* becomes evident.[73] Here, the French, [Empreint

[73] Here, Cuvier introduces the possibility of thinking *life* as a traumatic one. See Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Ed. Todd Dufresne and Gregory C. Richter. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2011. 32. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Sigmund Freud formulates a version of nonlife as the perspective of the organism that has "no wish to change" and that developed as if by accident. Freud writes when speculating about the origins of life: "In the last resort what has left its mark on the development of organism must be the history of the earth we live in and its relation to the sun. Every modification which is thus imposed upon the course of the organism's life is accepted by the conservative organic instincts and stored up for further repetition. Those instincts are therefore bound to give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new….If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons—-becomes inorganic once again—-then we shall be compelled to say that 'the aim of all life is death' and, looking backwards, that inanimate things existed before living ones." Freud theorizes that the organisms' instincts are oriented toward the inorganic, and not the organic, a distinction through which he begins to formulate his theory of trauma. Although I think there is a case to be made about Cuvier and the traumatic possibility of extinction, what I am mainly interested in here is how *uninterested* Hutton seems to be in the distinction between organic and inorganic, preferring to locate life elsewhere. Thinking the mineral cycle for Hutton does not appear to raise the question of *life* as a mysterious force anchored inside the organism.

partour pour l'oeil] and [lire] reinterprets the observer as the recipient of an "imprinting," a disclosure that itself reveals the "eye" to be "qualified" to "read" an "impress."

The point I wish to stress is not so much Cuvier's commitment to a catastrophist understanding of the earth, nor to propose that natural catastrophes are not thinkable without the Mosaic flood, but rather that the constitution of Cuvier's secular earthly observer—a proto-geologist—comes to understand humans as a "species" through an *imprinting,* a recognition interwoven with incomprehension, where to acknowledge existence of an ongoing "species life" is always to see the history of sedimentation as an *intrusion,* as the *question of its origin.* Cuvier's dramatization of extinction as an encounter conveys why *a species history* is itself fraught with difficulty, precisely because *the bundling of nature and the assurances of life* cannot be realized without a *geological history,* of life having become a *mineral*. For extinction to coexist with living species is to dwell in a geological present that tends, not only toward living power mobilized in anatomical structure but toward the making of deposits. Here, recognition of a species, of a tendency or organization toward life, is bound up with a historical passage of life's disappearance as a process of deposition.

Huttonian Pedagogy

If there is something distinctly modern about Cuvier, there is perhaps something distinctly antimodern about Hutton, for whom the very possibility of a geological system deflates "life" as a question. The stress that Cuvier places upon the encounter with extinction, of the *incomprehensibility of* species life as itself inextricable with extinction, contrasts sharply with Hutton's distinct lack of concern for the anatomy and morphology of species life and its links with the mineral processes of erosion, calcification, and crystallization. In his *Theory of the*

Earth, fossils have little to say about *the link between* anatomical structure or the encounter *with* species extinction. Hutton himself confesses that he cannot develop an interest in the "form" of fossils beyond categorical distinctions between animal and vegetable, marine and land.[74] Instead, Hutton's *Theory* extends a kind of assurance of erosion and deposition as making available a life already comprehensible to the human mind. For Cuvier, the "power" of life only dimly understood, as it *must arise from a dark history* arising from anatomical structure but rendered simultaneously inaccessible *by its fossilization.* Foucault would call this the "recession of the origin" that manifests as the "*positivity*" *of power,* an ineluctable relation with a *time arising from darkness.* By contrast, for Hutton, the earth offers the countervailing *accessibility* of "bodies," their permanence and continuity, as *already contributing* to the *appearance* of life at any given time.[75]

Such neglect of the structures of organisms would ostensibly produce a brute materialism that emphasizes points of non-distinction between life and death, matter and spirit. Noah Herringman observes in his study *Romantic Rocks* that the reception of James Hutton's 1795 treatise *Theory of the Earth* is thinly-veiled debate over the legitimacy of materialism, a debate that attracted Percy Shelley and Erasmus Darwin to ideas of "deep time" embodied in a primitive

[74] Repcheck, Jack. *The Man Who Found Time: James Hutton and the Discovery of the Earth's Antiquity.*Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2003.

[75] Foucault writes in the *Order of Things* that the "In the modern experience, on the contrary, the retreat of the origin is more fundamental than all experience, since it is in it that experience shines and manifests its positivity; it is because man is not contemporaneous with his being that things are presented to him with a time that is proper to them. And here we meet once again the initial theme of finitude. But this finitude, which was expressed first of all by the weight of things upon man – by the fact that he was dominated by life, history, and language – now appears at a more fundamental level: it is the insurmountable relation of man's being with time"(365).

materiality forged in subterranean heat.[76] Herringman proposes more broadly that Romantic literature's preoccupation with rock formations marks the emergence of a historical distinction between the "aesthetic" properties of rock and the industrial purposes of minerals. More importantly, "materiality" as a concept also inscribes a limit to experience, becoming what resists cognitive structuring. For Heringman, the emergence of *geoformations* as an "aesthetic" issue anticipates Romantic criticism's preoccupation with the convergence of the aesthetic and the *epistemic* in the "materiality" of the letter.[77] Yet it is important to note that for Hutton, the "material" is never thought about as external stuffs, *distinct from cognitive structuring but is precisely itself a marker of the power of thought.* Tracing geographical processes must be distinguished from the aesthetic properties of rock formations themselves—such a concept never interested Hutton and would be better explored by examining the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich or the landscapes of Jane Austen.

While a primordial materiality, bearing the stamp of the cosmos is certainly evident in Huttonian thought, Hutton's system is nevertheless *best understood as a* distancing, a formalizing *process* that is *distinct from Cuvier's "unsuspected" disruption to the organizing energies of life, and* an understanding that I think, can be seen in the subtle pedagogical role Hutton assigns to theorization itself. Such a process distinguishes, without ever severing processes of erosion and *deposition* from eschatological history. If Hutton appears too much a

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[76] For more on "Deep Time," see Stephen Jay Gould's *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* and Paolo Rossi's *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth & the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*. Both are hereafter cited in text.

[77] Herringman does not draw an exact parallel between Earthly materialism, aesthetic materialism, and the materiality of the letter. He writes more generally that "De Man's linguistic materiality seems far removeu from the earth's material. But his reading offers some suggestive parallels for a reading differently invested in materiality"(65).

Christian *Deist* in his commitments, it is worth noting how elaborating the "power" to repair appears, not to cede to the divine the impossible, but initiates a minimizing gesture by tapering the seemingly miraculous or the promethean to the intuitively human. As Paolo Rossi concisely observes, redeploying the metaphor that Hutton uses his medical writings: "Hutton's earth cannot be represented as a system capable of self-regulation…the earth, following an age-old tradition, is compared to the body of an animal in which healing follows partial destruction" (Rossi 115).[78] Poised between and engaging a divine power—the flood or the resurrection—Hutton diminishes the epistemic privilege gained by learning the "system" of the earth, knowing its uniquely unknown "rhythms" or its "self-repairing" power independent of man, but by its comprehensibility, drawing it to readily developed evidence derived from the bodies of animals, as if removing the resistance that knowing would need to overcome. Here, having experienced the permanency of "bodies" is already in some way to have received or understood a "system."

Hutton was never a surveyor or a prospector of minerals and drew extensively from Scottish Enlightenment thought, especially his regular correspondents Joseph Black, Adam Smith and David Hume. Yet Hutton himself is neither a skeptic—he defends ecclesiastical thought against Hume's skepticism—nor the provocative voice of an indifferent universe. [79] Adam Smith's view that the task of philosophy is to join "the connecting principles of nature" so

[78] See also John Playfair's *Biographical Account of James Hutton* where he clarifies, Hutton had pursued medical instruction between 1744 and1747 at the University in Edinburgh owing to his interest in chemistry, before continuing his education in Germany. Hutton was apprehensive about returning to practice medicine because the business in Edinburgh was "in the hands of a few eminent practitioners who had been long established; so that no opening was left for a young man whose merit was yet unknown"(4).

[79] For More on Hutton's religious views see Rachel Laudan's *From Mineralogy to Geology : The Foundations of a Science, 1650-1830.* as well as Jack Repcheck's new biography of Hutton, *The Man Who Found Time: James Hutton and the Discovery of the Earth's Antiquity.*

that the mind may grasp local events at "repose," is revised in Hutton's own lengthy, three-volume *An Investigation of the Principles of Knowledge: And of the Progress of Reason, From Sense to Science and Philosophy* into a moral pedagogy.[80] Balanced between morality and *mere* pleasure, Hutton, unlike Smith, locates the role of natural philosophy not in the events grasped, but in human improvement discerned: "There is a tendency in nature to make evil less, and in human nature to improve itself by promoting knowledge"(III. I. 3). Hutton elucidates in his 1792 *Dissertation on Different Subjects of Natural Philosophy,* that "matter may be considered as acting powers" and the "several intentions, perceived as belonging to those acting powers, may be considered as *modifications* of matter." [81] Discerning what belongs to intention, to the *will,* Hutton argues, *is* the mind's reception of the modification of matter. What Heringman describes as a kind of persistent materiality is certainly present in Hutton's *Theory,* but what matters for Hutton is that matter*'s* impact can be found within the vicissitudes of thought and in apparent changes *in the mind*:

> External things, considered metaphysically, have the power to act and to be affected, that is, to produce change in our mind, and to be apparently changed, in consequence of the action of our mind. But, the various modes in which those changes may take place or happen, that is to say, the order of those eventual things, these are in the mind, or properly belong to that intellectual being which then conceives of those things (III. II. 2).

Hutton's teleological universe is thus overlaid with a poetic one. What is "external "comes to *matter not by becoming part of an "external" system* but to "produce change in our mind and to be apparently changed," where the mind can produce modal possibilities of what "may take

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[80] Hutton, James. *An Investigation of the Principles of Knowledge: And of the Progress of Reason, From Sense to Science and Philosophy*. Printed for A. Strahan, and T. Cadell, London, 1794. Hereafter cited in Text.

[81] Hutton, James, and Ferguson of Raith. *Dissertations on Different Subjects in Natural Philosophy.*Edinburgh: Printed for A. Strahan, and T. Cadell, London., 1792. 501.

place or happen," in the privileged space of the intellect. This manner of moving from a *divine, external power to* having been *impacted through an engagement of the mind's powers,* in exercising a power that "apparently" belongs to the mind and whose possibilities reside *equally within the mind.*

It's a "mineral" life

Having situated Hutton within the context of a pedagogical enterprise, let us look anew at his 1788 *Theory of the Earth.* Assessments of Hutton's contributions to geology, heat-based consolidation of new rock and an early articulation of gradualism, address us qualified by their incorporation into the works of his early nineteenth-century successors, particularly Charles Lyell and his field defining opus *Principles of Geology*. In certain ways, Hutton himself can be classified as "Romantic" beyond questions of his influence because our understanding of the composition and reception of his *Theory of the Earth* appears, like much of Romantic literature, has become inseparable from the events of the French Revolution and legacy of Enlightenment science in Britain. The publication of his 1795 two-volume *Theory* coincided with an intensification of pressures placed on natural-scientific publications by the conservative government of William Pitt the Younger. Scrutiny over the relation between natural philosophy and religion owing to the proliferation of natural-historical vernacular in the debate over the French Revolution amplified the political stakes of Hutton's natural philosophy, an increased political awareness that oversaw the eventual revision of geology itself into a rigorous, inductive method, dealing primarily with the history of the earth without constructing theories of the earth.

I turn primarily to the 1788 version for my engagement with Hutton's argument because the conciseness of the earlier version of Hutton's argument seems to me uniquely poised to

capture the project of theorizing an earth in relation to habitability, an undertaking that as I noted earlier, more or less disappears after Hutton.[82] While we are accustomed to thinking that geological knowledge commits us to promethean geoengineering projects, to a life that retreats into the mystery of its carbonite depositions, Hutton prefaces his inquiry into earth's operations with an appeal to what is "natural" to man, that man "alone is… made to enjoy, in contemplation as well as sensual pleasure, all the good that may be observed in the constitution of this world; he, therefore, should be made the first subject of enquiry"(1788, 211). From the outset, the human is aligned not with the body and its requirements but with the mimetic energies mobilized in "contemplation" and "sensual pleasure." In the opening pages of the first chapter, Hutton describes the earth as a "mechanism" set in motion to maintain animal and vegetal life. He proposes to take the "ends and means" for the construction of a "habitable world," not intervention in the world, as "the object of attention."

Unlike Cuvier, who begins in the midst of an incomprehensible encounter with species life, Hutton begins with the perspective of mineral earth, of a recognizable "intention" already interwoven with the qualities of existence, in acknowledgment of an earth "constructed" for "habitability." Life is not deduced from the requirements of anatomy but what is readily accessible as "intentions," signified by visible material modifications. Despite advancing a controversial theory of subterranean heat, the *Theory of the Earth* initially received favorable consideration for its epistemic humility and its willingness to concede secular limits to what the "Book of Nature" can reveal. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* of 1797 summarized Hutton's

[82] Hutton's prose is not known for its succinctness or precise turns of phrase. Tom Furniss's "literary" reading of Hutton's *Theory* likewise focuses on the 1788 version. He additionally observes, in a separate article, that Hutton's theory was in tact before his tours of Scotland to find evidence to support his theories of subterranean heat, much of which would be worked into the 1795 two volume version.

argument at length, concluding that Huttonian theory neither explicitly dismisses nor sets out to prove scripture: "the beginning of the world was occasioned by a power which cannot possibly be investigated, because it lies without the bounds of Nature itself, and far against all theories of the earth which seek to derive its origin from natural causes."[83]

The tenuous relation Hutton maintains to Biblical exegesis, "this power which cannot possibly be investigated," transforms the mimetic comprehension of the earth, the limiting of our epistemic powers, into a quasi-ethical exercise of theorizing habitability *without needing to inhabit sovereign power.* As Hutton is keenly aware, to separate natural philosophy from divine revelation risks challenging the *legibility* of a divine, sovereign power, a power that he is careful never to refute. As Michelle Geric points out, Hutton's theory of an "invisible internal heat" in the earth's interior, a power that would conflate "gradual and profound change" with "seeming stability" provides a compelling concept for shedding sovereign power *without the familiarity of what it promises*, a concept taken up from the abyssal figure of Demogorgon in Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound.* For Geric, Hutton's subterranean heat is a model for understanding Shelley's vision of gradual but complete revolutionary change. [84]

Yet despite its compatibility *with* "revolutionary change," a change that for Shelley *must be palpable, to know that a change has taken place,* to feel and know revolution *is* not itself precisely *not* Hutton's aim. The purpose is to *suspend* the "revelatory" positions of either origin or apocalyptic judgment for understanding geological process. Such a strict identification with mineral process initiates a kind of secularization of sovereign agency through which we

[83] For more on favorable summaries of Hutton and the *Encyclopedia Britannica entry,* see Dennis R. Dean. 255.

[84] Geric, Michelle. "Shelley's 'cancelled Cycles': Huttonian Geomorphology and Catastrophe in Prometheus Unbound(1820)." *Romanticism*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2013, pp. 31-43.

understand both earth's activities and individual or collective human responses to them. In contrast to Burnet's *eschatology,* Hutton's enable*s* revelation—if it can be called revelation at all—to become less like the possession of new knowledge and more like the attunement to the imperceptible but already existing, that which interweaves the human with the "background," the minerals of the earth or the movements of the ocean.

Unwilling to contradict scripture, Hutton attempts to dispense with sacred geology's guiding premise—that the Mosaic flood is legible on the surface of the earth—without dispensing with Biblical history:

> Now, if we are to take the written history of man for the rule by which we should judge of the time when the species first began, that period would be but little removed from the present state of things. The Mosaic history places this beginning of man at no great distance; and there has not been found, in natural history, any document by which a high antiquity might be attributed to the human race. But this is not the case with regard to the inferior species of animals, particularly those which inhabit the ocean and its shores. We find in natural history monuments which prove that those animals had long existed; and we thus procure a measure for the computation of a period of time extremely remote, though far from being precisely ascertained (1788 211).

Unlike Cuvier, for whom "natural history monuments" are signs of violence, markers of species life's inextricable relation to extinction, Hutton discerns a "life" not morphologically recognizable as "life like us," but a mere function of the oceans and the land as "habitable" places—a habitability that depends on the ability of land to perish and subsequently replenish itself. Fossilized remains are notable for Hutton mainly because they prove that a habitable earth "long existed" in a "time extremely remote," and "far from…precise." Unlike a linear, evolutionary history, where generations of species, submit to the distinctions of continuity and extinction, life for the earthly observer, comes and goes within the cyclical, narrative of mineral cycles.

The "adaptedness" of land masses to vegetable life follows the logic of necessity, where through continuous, partial destruction, the earth produces soil:

> A solid body of land could not have answered the purpose of a habitable world; for a soil is necessary to the growth of plants; and a soil is nothing but the materials collected from the destruction of the solid land. Therefore, the surface of this land, inhabited by man, and covered with plants and animals, is made by nature to decay, in dissolving from that hard and compact state in which it is found below the soil; and this soil is necessarily washed away, by the continual circulation of the water, running from the summits of the mountains towards the general receptacle of that fluid (214).

As the movement of teleological reasoning attests, the task of reason is to assume the perspective of a machine for which all the parts exist for the purpose of habitability. Thinking minerally means including the vegetal—noting that the earth may be constructed for purposes that are not *quite* human but accessible distinctively to human intellect and sensibility. The distinction between plant life and agriculture here is quite important (Hutton is clear that man has no "high antiquity"), but despite the limited duration of human history, human reason has no problems accessing the logic of the system.

Hutton extends across the topography of the earth differences between the living and the nonliving but subordinates this distinction to the visible process of attrition:

> Our land has two extremities; the tops of the mountains, on the one hand, and the sea-shores, on the other: It is the intermediate space between these two, that forms the habitation of plants and animals. While there is a sea-shore and a higher ground, there is that which is required in the system of the world: Take these away, and there would remain an aqueous globe, in which the world would perish. But, in the natural operations of the world, the land is perishing continually; and this is that which now we want to understand (262).

The analogy between the "extremities" of the earth and extremities of the human body are certainly evident, yet the crux of Hutton's analogy is not spatial-anatomical but temporal-cyclical. The analogy works by focusing *habitable land* as an "intermediate space" between two movements, "perishing" and solidification. For Hutton, living organisms are not dated by their

fossils but because of their tendency to fossilize after death only to *return in a different organism*, always suspended time in an interval between perishing and restoration, afforded by the earth's ability to "perish continually." Species life may come and go, but access to the logic of the system and its suitability for life, the premise of geological study, is interwoven with the "natural operations" of the globe.

Focusing on mineral operations and not on the specific species that populate the earth, Hutton reinterprets the cycles of species from the perspective of gravel formation:

> We may also conclude, that there had been operations similar to those which we now find natural to the globe, and necessarily exerted in the actual formation of gravel, sand and clay. But what we have now chiefly in view to illustrate is this, that there had then been in the ocean a system of animated beings, which propagated their species, and which have thus continued their several races to this day (232).

The proliferation of certain compositions of sedimentation is for Hutton the sign of an earth already adapted to life, and composed of the elements that once composed life. Remarkably, Hutton appears uninterested in the very idea of species extinction:

> There are, indeed, varieties in those species, compared with the present animals which we examine, but no greater varieties than may perhaps be found among the same species in the different quarters of the globe. Therefore, the system of animal life, which had been maintained in the ancient sea, had not been different from that which now subsists, and of which it belongs to naturalists to know the history (234).

Hutton proposes that it is for "naturalists"—botanists and zoologists—to know the varieties and histories of marine species. (Although some attempts have been made to correlate species life to distinct epochs— a "historical" geology based on fossil records did not become the mainstream until the 1820s). Habitability, by contrast, is a process unattached to any specific species of life but quite oriented toward a system, a set of operations conducive *toward life.* Despite the inhuman valences of erosion and repair, Hutton demonstrates that to think about species compositionally, from the perspective of minerals, is to lessen the *emphasis* we place on the

organizational power over life precisely because it neither begs the question of life's origin nor stresses its orientation toward an *end.* He makes neither a temporal distinction "not that different from that which now subsists" nor the aligns of "varieties of species" across a timeline that orients them toward extinction.

Subterranean Heat and the Question of Force

The central chapters of the 1788 *Theory* are devoted to the advancing a theory of subterranean heat, its role as a "natural operation" in "consolidating strata" and creating the "uplift" that raises land above the sea. Hutton observes that the globe is "composed of sand, of gravel, of argillaceous and calcareous strata," and deduces that in discovering the natural operations that act upon animal remains will reveal the method for reparation. Positioning himself against the Neptunists, lead by Abraham Gottlob Werner and his Freiborg school, Hutton argues that mineral veins cannot be the precipitates of aqueous solutions. Instead, he argues that siliceous and sulphureous bodies are concretized by subterranean heat. Hutton notes that siliceous matter is not soluble in water, nor does it crystalize in solution. Furthermore, sulphurous substances, Hutton claims, are generally *not* soluble but are "fusible" by heat. If water indeed could seal rock formations, then liquid would be visible in the crevices between layers of rock.

Hutton claims to draw his observations from the specimens in his personal collection and reexamining Horace Benedict de Saussure's *Voyage dans les Alpes*, but his speculations were not, for the most part, observable, either in the field or in laboratory conditions. [85] Jean André De Luc, whose influence on Cuvier is well documented, became one of Hutton's most stringent

[85] Hutton quotes extensively from Saussure's *Voyages* in the 1795 two-volume version.

critics. In his "Letter to Dr. Hutton" De Luc responded scathingly to Hutton's claim that "no siliceous body, having no hardness of flint, nor any crystallization of that substance, has been formed except by fire," noting that "no known operation of fire has ever produced, either flint, or any crystallization of that substance."[86]Richard Kirwan likewise notes that neither Lavoisier, Saussure, nor Ehrman have been able to reproduce in laboratory conditions the crystallization of calcareous substances that formed a crucial part of Hutton's argument (Dean 108). What may be disconcerting to experimental approaches is that Hutton's operations did not rely exclusively or even predominantly upon evidence that would be visible *on the surface,* but would serve the requirements of the surface. Instead his logic follows the contours of Aristotle's efficient causes, relying upon *necessity to* prevent recourse to the demonstration of *divine power,* diverting to the tempering effects of *reason.*

In arguing for heat as the cause of congelation and uplift, Hutton appeals to forces discernible in the strata, noting that strata is "broken and separated in every possible direction; and, from a plane, they are bent and doubled. It is impossible that they could have originally been formed by the known laws of nature"(1788 272). To read the strata, then, is to concede there are forces operative that are not readily deducible from their effects. Hutton's argument is in many ways readily intuitive to the modern reader as it underpins contemporary understandings of earthly topography. It is common to refer to volcanic eruptions as a safety valves or an already tamed, a "subterranean furnace" to preserve the habitable intermediate space between extremities of uplift and depression:

> A volcano is not made on purpose to frighten superstitious people into fits of piety and devotion, nor to overwhelm devoted cities with destruction; a volcano should be considered as a spiracle to the subterranean furnace, in order to prevent the unnecessary

[86] De Luc, Jean André. *Letter to Dr. Hutton.* 1790a *Monthly Review*. n. s. 2:581-3

> elevation of land, and fatal effects of earthquakes; and we may rest assured, that they, in general, wisely answer the end of their intention, without being in themselves an end, for which nature had exerted such amazing power and excellent contrivance (1788, 275).

Dispensing with superstition and the threat volcanos pose to species life, Hutton perceives its activities as a "contrivance" and a "spiracle" into the "subterranean furnace." Naïve as Hutton's teleology might seem, the idea that volcanos "wisely answer[s] the end of their intention" without "being in themselves an end" prevents them from becoming a demonstration of "power" to be worshipped or usurped. An "excellent contrivance" of "nature," does not so much make volcanoes amenable to every intention, but it does enable to the volcano to be amenable to *different* "intentions," including a revolutionary "intention" in nature, borne out by the writings of Blake and Shelley. Tom Furniss points out that Hutton's very system seems conflicted about the origin of the earth:

> Hutton's conclusion that it is in vain "to look for anything higher in the origin of the earth"—which could mean that all signs, all 'vestiges,' of the Earth's original creation by a higher power have long since vanished, but could equally mean that Hutton's theory adequately accounts for the Earth's origin without the need to suppose a higher creating power. The text as a whole, as we have seen, oscillates between attributing the systems it describes to the benevolent design of the author of nature and to nature itself... The suggestion that 'in nature there is wisdom, system, and consistency' could be read as claiming that nature has been shared in a consistent way by a wise higher power, but it could equally indicate that nature itself possesses these attributes ().

Furniss hints that in the very elaboration of a system, there exists the possibility of transferring power, from the divine to nature, and of oscillating between the two. Instead of emphasizing nature's expulsion of the divine or the revelatory impress that nature exposes, Hutton appears to strike a balance, neither wishing to elevate the divine enigma of *what nature is capable of revealing* nor to reduce nature to chance or human indifference. His system appears to leave something open to reading, deciphering nature's marks in such a way where the source of power

cannot be *usurped by knowing its design,* but the design is left open to the pleasures of deducing intention, and its successive transformations in the mind.

Reading Pliny, Hutton's Historiography

Finally, having to attempted to trace an attentiveness to earthly processes that turns away from species life to the tendencies of life available to the epistemic and moral subject, I want to examine the historiographical repercussions of Hutton's theory. Despite appearances, Hutton's history is not, to borrow a phrase from the Baron d'Holbach, a "natural history" that "embraces all spaces equally, all times, and has no limits" where man is continually besieged by the "effects and operations of nature."[87] Yet it is unclear how *history,* if not fixed to a timeline of species variation or eschatological events, can be measured by such a system. Unlike theories that would situate the observer vertically along the "Chain of Being" or horizontally along a vector of Biblical events, Hutton situates the observer on the surface of an inducible but "imperceptible" cycle—an economy that moves doubly toward perfection and destruction. Here, it is illuminating to revisit Stephen Jay Gould's observation that Hutton's theory of consolidation through subterranean heat "impos[es] upon the earth, *a priori,* the most pure and rigid concept of time's cycle ever presented in geology"(Gould 63). Gould notes that from the perspective of nineteenth century geology, the anti-narrative tendencies of the 1788 version borders on a fanatic formalism. Hutton appeals to granite cutting across layers of distinct strata as evidence for cycles of uplift. But he does not construct a timeline from the distinct strata. Hutton neither references a Biblical course of events nor attempts to construct a secular timeline of the earth (89-90).

At stake in retroactive appraisals of Hutton is a circular "time," a mode of consistent re-

[87] Gould, Stephen Jay. Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

orientation by the epistemic subject that actively resists a historicization. Proper to the experience of "thinking geologically" is to note the doubleness of erosion and uplift, an insistent *negation* that in the passage from A to B, *can take a humanizing shape and therein lies its impact,* but it insistently refutes *becoming a power over the material that would usurp the divine.*

If we contrast Hutton's pedagogy with the methods that propose to *recognize the "human" in the layers of the strata,* we begin to better understand the danger that Hutton deftly sidesteps. The danger, here, is to *commit to a "species activity," to intervene in the species,* to usurp the very power of the divine that the "system" intends us to register, to comprehend. The invitation of the "geosocial" to *think* more innovative ways of "inhabiting strata," would appear to mark, not so much a temporal distinction between geological periods but to *enact a* species *power,* a process that also *fixes an "intention."* Writing about the lackluster response to climate change, Donna Haraway, borrowing from the science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson proposes: "Perhaps the Dithering is a more apt name than either the Anthropocene or Capitalocene! The Dithering will be written into earth's rocky strata, indeed already is written into earth's mineralized layers. Symchthonic ones don't dither; they compose and decompose, which are both dangerous and promising practices"(102). The protean qualities of the human are fixed, not to a material process, but to a history of becoming. This *becoming* encourages the reader to become part of the species collective, so that we "will" becomes what is written into the mineral layers of the strata, that perhaps, Haraway hopes, in a more virtuous way. Here, intent, unlike what is made accessible in Hutton's geological contemplation, is not deduced from "modified matter," it is woven into the position of the post-geological, where future generations (were they to look back at all) will find the true "intentions" of the species legible in the layers of rock. Against this understanding of *history* that *enacts a "species activity"* legible in the future,

what might it mean to think "history" truly in terms of a *mineral process* instead of a *species* one?

For Hutton, thinking *minerally* does not mean projecting ourselves into the future but apprehending the present. As I have stated in the introduction, the hope in introducing a Romantic geology is to bring to light a different mode of "mineral" becoming, a processual, pedagogical becoming less fixed to *species technology* and closer to the proliferation of "intentions" and "social forms" that minerals are capable of granting, one that resists a history thought in relation to the ultimate judgment of the future. Hutton's insistent resistance to thinking *geological and biological history* becomes especially self-evident in his coordination between what can be witnessed and what must occur independently:

> It is not necessary that the present land should be worn away and wasted, exactly in proportion as new land shall appear; or, conversely, that an equal proportion of new land should always be produced as the old is made to disappear. It is only required, that, at all times, there should be a just proportion of land and water upon the surface of the globe, for the purpose of a habitable world (286).

His points of focus, "portion" and "measure," are both analytical markers of quantity displaced, and metaphors of what is "just" or appropriate that can only be qualitatively engaged. The only marker he insists upon is a "just portion of land and water upon the surface of the globe," that can be taken as a figure for the joining of habitability and mineral materials. Thinking *geos* in cycles does certainly enables a theoretical system, but what happens when the "system" must be brought into contact with historical events?

Having established that very little can be observed in a single life owing to the imperceptibility of cycles, Hutton turns to history, observing that man is "not confined to what he sees; he has the experience of former men." Here, thinking "minerally" coincides with the contemplation of historical life, as he looks to the "Romans and the Greeks in search of a

measure of our coasts, which we may compare with the present state of things"(298). At this juncture, Hutton does not look to experimentation, which would be impossible, but to natural history and the attrition of the earth. Hutton prefaces his search with the already anticipated impossibility of quantification:

> It is in vain to attempt to measure a quantity which escapes our notice, and which history cannot ascertain; and we might just as well attempt to measure the distance of the stars without a parallax, as to calculate the destruction of the solid land without a measure corresponding to the whole (298-9)

If the earth cannot be weighed, and part of the earth cannot be measured in proportion to the whole, how then, can loss and renewal be calibrated? Hutton's *geological system* frustrates eschatological history by refusing to reinterpret *"imperceptibility"* through quantitative methods, noting that the "quantity" displaced itself cannot be ascertained is the very same one that "escapes our notice."[88] Nevertheless, renewing the comparison between a system of the earth and a system of the celestial movement, in comparing the "quantities" of the earth displaced to reaching for the "stars without a parallax," Hutton renders this imperceptibility itself *less impactful,* as if aligning one *inconsequential inability* with *another,* a similar comparison that as I will demonstrate in my third chapter, that Jean-Jacques Rousseau takes up in his contemplation of "natural man," a man who is *permitted,* by teleological history, *to forget.*

Hutton's appeal to Pliny the Elder is brief, but its presence as one of the few sources from antiquity notes that geology is not merely a question of elaborating a system but concerns the "*experience*" of a "historical" subject. Inseparable from topography in its inception, geology remains, however tenuously, connected to the *appearance of the earth and the possibility of a comparative history* of moments. Delving into the geological history of the Mediterranean,

[88] See Heringman, Noah. Sciences of Antiquity: Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History, and Knowledge Work. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Hutton cites Pliny's claims that "Italy was distant from Sicily a mile and a half" but that "such a measure is but little calculated to afford us the just means of a comparison with the present distance"(300). Again, the "measure" of Italy is taken, both quantitatively and metaphorically, as a "just means of…comparison" with the "present." The inability to discern the rate of attrition raises the problem of *historical* perception in general: "all that we can conclude from this history of Pliny is, that, in all times, to people considering the appearances of those two approached coasts, it had seemed probable, that the sea formed a passage between the two countries which had been once united"(300). Hutton notes that Pliny's account is "applicable" insofar as Sicily and Italy were, in the popular imagination, once conjoined and later overtaken by sea. Yet his reading also points us to a kind of geological thinking about the "appearance" of the Italian coast, what it "once" had been, that is applicable "at all times." What matters is not only that the time separating Pliny and Hutton is too short to observe any substantial changes, but that their shared historical perspective comprises only the "appearance of the coast," a shared *surface.* In other words, what imperceptibility of displacement, an unmeasured constant erosion, enables for Hutton, is a *dimension of the surface that is a mere surface,* that resonates with what Paul de Man would diagnose as a "materialist vision," proper to the Kantian system. De Man writes of Kant's "architectonic vision" as "entirely devoid of teleological interference," yet instead of lingering with "mere looking," Hutton speculates about the coast in Pliny's time.

Despite separating "poetic fiction" from science, Hutton's system appears itself to enable "poetry," leaving poetry distinctively poised to determine the meaning and impact of geological "events." Hutton's geology also *revises* or rather, *reverses* Pliny's account by transforming a violent disruption into a "passage." He quotes Pliny's phrase: "*Quondam Brutio agro cohserens, mox intersuso mari avulsa*"(300). In Pliny's own account, the farmland of the Bruttian people

were rend apart by the intruding sea—or the sea rushed into the scene of agrarian life. Pliny reads the shape of the coast as the "breaking away of Sicily," a "breaking" derived from the naming of the city: "the Greeks named the town situated on the Italian side of the strait Rhegium," derived from "rhegnunai, to break."[89] Pliny's narrative incorporates such a "break" within the founding narrative of Rome and nature's interweaving integrations with *Roman* power. As Mary Beagon points out, echoing Hutton's own "intention" giving contemplations, in the *Historia Naturalis,* nature actively seeks out and seems to participate, with "intention," in human events.[90] By recasting the coast as a forming a passage, Hutton intervenes again in a *historiographic* process which Pliny exemplifies. Such a process is not the one Cuvier identifies, through its involutions of the earth—but precisely the process dependent upon the capacity of the intellect to detach, to take for granted an "appearance" as available in some sense, at "all time." The equivocation of a "passage" and a "break," *is,* then, to be able to turn away from a geological force—a natural force—that Pliny marks as an essential part of being Roman, of coming *after* Rome.

Hutton's theory does not conceptualize the *impact of the human* on the earth precisely because he never thinks to locate the human in mineral deposition, yet he does theorize the *impact of geological events* and their surprising amenability to variation. By detaching geological process from eschatology without ever negating it, Hutton appears to expose the observer to a different kind of secular *inscription.* Let us reconsider, here, the question Clare Colebrook poses in her essay "Sex and the (Anthropocene) City": "how did [we] generate the conception of 'humanity' such that it could then refer to that stratification with the

[89] Pliny, John Bostock, and Henry T Riley. The Natural History of Pliny. London: H. G. Bohn, 1855.
[90] Salmon, John, and Graham. Shipley, eds. Human Landscapes in Classical Antiquity: Environment and Culture. London: Routledge, 1996.

Anthropocene?"(Yusoff 44). Hutton's system is not itself a mechanism for guaranteeing earthly habitation, but it presents powerful secular way of *marking* the earth as having been habitable and inhabited that is always subject to the power of *inscription of a different kind,* of a "passage" or a "break," that links us to *historical past.* We might here, think about the contrast this question provides to the geological "subject" already introduced in Barbara Adam's formulation of the human as structured by internal and environmental "cycles"—yet here "perishing continually" places the thinking subject in relation to a cycle that is always in the process of *remaking* an appearance of the earth and thus, rendering thinkable the arbitrary *inscription* of which the subject is constantly exposed.

Here, erosion is a formal cycle but also nature's remaking of a geopolitical surface of reading, the eroding of earthly "ground" that oddly, makes historical meaning *something in construction.* Hutton's speculative mineral cycles come into contact with the surfaces of history precisely by *subordinating* the "break" of Pliny to the observation of a "passage" not immediately given. In his lengthy *Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory of the Earth,* Hutton's disciple John Playfair admits, for instance, the difficulty of imagining what cannot be seen but a point of view of necessity that must be actively reasoned. Playfair writes "The imagination naturally feels less difficulty in conceiving, that an unstable fluid like the sea, which changes its level twice everyday, has undergone a permanent depression in its surface than that the land, the *terra firma* itself, has admitted of an equal elevation. In all this however, we are guided much more by fancy than reason; for in order to depress or elevate the absolute level of the sea, by a given quantity...we must depress or elevate it by the same quantitiy over the whole surface of the earth"(297). Playfair's account offers a way to understand geological imagination in a different way from Hutton, by displacing and marking the earth in a way that is not immediately visible

and is, in its aesthetic form, closer to the sea. What matters is not the constant displacement that Hutton is absorbed by, but the possibility of measuring, quantifying displacement.

By ceding so much to thinking with a system alone, Hutton's "uniformitarianism," diverges in key respects from Charles Lyell's over thirty years later. At the risk of belaboring the point, Hutton's continual cycles of repair are not *visibly uniform*—spatially or temporally—but the teleological operations that preserve a habitat for living things.[91] While several of Lyell's listed uniformities relate to empirically observable claims, Hutton's "uniformity" over time can only be inferred from an ideal system arrived at through reasoning. Lyell in this respect is an inheritor, not of Hutton but of John Playfair's reading of Hutton's theory. For Playfair, writing several years after Hutton's death, proposes that the "incontrovertible principle" of the earth would emerge through description alone: "Indeed, if the face of the earth were divided into districts, and accurately described we have no doubt that, from the comparison of these descriptions, the true theory of the earth would spontaneously emerge without any effort of genius or invention. It would appear as an incontrovertible principle, about which all men, the moment that the facts were stated to them, must of necessity agree." [92] Playfair's process of description is one that Hutton never himself acquiesced to. He takes the subject *exposed* to the constantly changing face of the earth an archival possibility, a drive to "describe the whole [of the] earth."

[91] Lyell, Charles. Principles of Geology. 1st ed., University of Chicago Press ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

[92] See Porter, Roy. The Making of Geology: Earth Science in Britain, 1660-1815. Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

CHAPTER TWO:WORDSWORTH'S ATMOSPHERIC SHIFTS

Continued Like Trees

In his *Lectures on the English Poets*, William Hazlitt distinguishes between the "moralizing" poetry of William Wordsworth from the robust, corporeal ballads of Robert Burns in the following fashion:

> In Mr. Wordsworth there is a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body; the banns are forbid, or a separation is austerely pronounced from bed and board—a *mensa et thoro*. From the *Lyrical Ballads*, it does not appear that men eat or drink, marry or are given in marriage. If we lived by every sentiment that proceeded out of mouths, and not by bread or wine, or if the species were continued like trees (to borrow an expression from the great Sir Thomas Brown), Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would be just as good as ever."[93]

Hazlitt notes with some irony that the *Lyrical Ballads* comprises a volume of poetry remarkable for what it excludes: the physical, quotidian needs of the human species. Hazlitt finds it understandably curious that poetry that boasts "incidents drawn from ordinary life" presents a life uninterested in eating, drinking, and sex. Wordsworth's poetry, he observes, accomplishes a curious "disunion and divorce" from the from the rhythms of bodily and economic life, lingering instead in the attenuations of "sentiments" expressed. In his gentle mockery of Wordsworthian effusion, Hazlitt appraises Wordsworth's seeming prudishness while raising the intriguing possibility of a poetry as what "would be just as good" *if* the *species were radically different*, that would accommodate the anomaly of a species "continued like trees." Through, several revisions, I have been looking for ways to take up Hazlitt's suggestions about how Wordsworth poetry proposes "moments" capable of diverging *from speciation,* enabling us to find, where one

[93] Hazlitt, William. *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt.* Ed. A. R. Waller, Arnold Glover, and William Ernest Henley. London: J.M. Dent & co., 1902. 334

expected to find an anthropology of eating, sleeping and copulating, a "*poetry that is just as good."* Wordsworth more than any other poet appears to find everyday life engaged, *not deeply entrenched habits of living* but in "*habits of speech,*" *a* project of "describ[ing] objects and uttering sentiments" (*LB* 175).[94]

Taking my cue from what, drawing on Eve Sedgwick and J.L. Austin, Anne-Lise François observes to be the "constative" aspect of Wordsworth's language that appears to hold in tension spatialized landscapes and emotional resonance as if reserving the space for something "unspeakable" in nature itself, this chapter expands upon the flexibility that *t*he lapsed, episodic, interrupted experiential qualities of the lyric affords to "ecological*"* thinking. I contend that demystification of the sovereign subject has perhaps overdetermined its contours and overshadowed the amount of flexibility thinking about epistemic perspective. A sense of subjective continuity whether constituted by finitude and inertia, can soften forms of economic *and rationalizing logic, their implicit teleologies merely* by positing an "lyric" history. Glimpses of this possibilities reverberate in Hazlitt's passing reference to Sir Thomas Browne. Hazlitt, though he is far from alone, appears to have been struck peculiar simile in *Religio Medici*: "I could be content that we might procreate like trees, without conjunction, or that there were any way to perpetuate the world without this trivial and vulgar act of coition; It is the foolishest act a

[94] Correlative to this may be attempts to think futurity in "queer theory." For instance, Lee Edelman's "No Future" where Edelman makes a strong case for thinking against: "That logic compels us, to the extent that we would register as politically responsible, to submit to the framing of political debate – and, indeed, of the political field – as defined by the terms of what this book describes as reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations"(). Edelman's concerns are aimed at a very specific canon. I rather think, like Emily Rohrbach, that "futurity" does not subsist as an "organizing principle" in Romantic literature but as a manner of *opening* the present, rendering it less stable.

wise man commits in all his life, nor is there anything that will more deject his cooled imagination."[95] By imagining that mankind might have been designed differently, to "procreate like trees," "species relation" appears to be an odd carrier for Browne's own desire ("I could be content") to be alleviated from sexual relation. Yet Browne, we might say, but as central to *species relation, as if the mere assertion of difference enables our attachments and investments.* To what extent does sexuate desire become, here, in the words of Luce Irigaray, "an appeal for entering into relations with the other as a source and an embodiment of life different from" ours?(Irigaray 86). Certainly, such an appeal only remains possible if embodiment becomes, not a site of determined *identity* but a site where species relations, are reconfigured by a history. Browne subtly transforms reproductive sex from an abstract quality of the human species, into a "fate" that generates subversive inclinations and aesthetic preferences. He rejects the "vulgar" act of heterosexual coupling, yet he also treats his "dejectedness" as something that is not merely a personal but a species-wide judgment, one that at least for Hazlitt, introduces the seductions of a vegetal continuity.

Atmospheric Constitutions

Some of the limitations of reading Wordsworth for ecocritical purposes, I think, stem from the pressures to retrace a modernizing history with which to define the "historical" point of departure for Romantic poetry. As I began to propose in the introduction, the requisite emphasis on collective action often consigns genres like the "pastoral" or the "lyric" to the margins, as if urgent contexts are defined by *deepening* the totalizing, broadly reaching perspective of modernity, its distinctions between vegetal, animal life and tinkering with their organization

[95] Browne, Thomas. Thomas Browne. Ed. Kevin Killeen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

within a "living" system. Yet thinking with Wordsworth, I propose, remains both difficult and necessary because of the perplexing and somewhat perverse way Wordsworth's poetry has recently come to ground what I understand to be the "lapserian" gaze of contemporary ecocriticism. Perhaps exemplified by the work of Timothy Morton, this lapserian perspective accepts the dizzying sense of guilt proper to moments of truncated or suspended development in *The Prelude* and *The Lyrical Ballads*, as a kind of "fantasy space," through which an *abstracted,* modern subject can recuperate responsibility for its *making*. [96]

Anahid Nersessian proposes that Wordsworth's rhetoric renders in particular "what secularism feels like," that the imagination of secularity hinges on "the distillation of older ways of inhabiting the world and its reconstitution as tone." Drawing on Nersessian, I would propose that *lyrical utterance* reconstitutes as a distinct *perceptual history* that "tone" or "atmosphere" would aptly describe, where disclosures of gestures enmeshed with economic or scientific developments never suppresses a non-hierarchical familiarity that poetry grants to speaker and addressee. Wordsworth's lyrics thus models an experience of what Morton identifies as "becoming implicated," but to very different effect than Morton himself perhaps intends. Here, *implication* depends on the accumulation of surprising modes of mutual reception that rationalizing, scientific discourses permit rather than supersede. Instead of invigorating a sense of "formal responsibility" penetrating into traditional forms of the pastoral or the georgic, feeling "implicated" receives an insuperable negativity received as modes of "familiarity" within poetic genres. Wordsworth's method, I propose, unfolds through the paradoxical way in which "familiarity" is able to think and speak temporal "depths" and spatial "wholes," without the

[96] See *Ecology Without Nature,* especially "The Art of Environmental Language" and "Romanticism and the Environmental Subject."

insistence and the possibility of penetrating to the core, an ability enables useful resonances of continuity and resemblance to accrue in the lyric.[97] At stake then, is *a generosity that stems from* the understanding unfolds by emphasizing the bits that are "specific" or "particular," without denying or otherwise affirming a achieve formal relation.

After Ecology?

As the titular claim of his influential work *Ecology Without Nature* already suggests, Morton locates a historical dimension of *ecological experience* within the denial of destruction in the "natural" and the "pastoral." This historical sensibility would no longer succumb to pre-enlightenment illusions of what is "natural." The success of this perspective depends on the way Morton seeks to read Wordsworthian lyric, not *as lyric* but as a "constructed" aesthetic experience. Prompted by Wordsworth's reference in the Preface of the *Lyrical Ballads* that the poet seeks an "atmosphere of sensation" in which to "spread his wings"(*LB 107*), Morton reads Wordsworth as a poet of "suspension" and "mediality," classifying Wordsworth among Romantic authors that "ironically create" a "heightened atmosphere, neither full nor empty," presiding over a "thick" space that "is strictly impossible, but it is a compelling fantasy"(*EWN 93*). The figure of an "atmosphere" constitutes for Morton a spatial delineation that distills the perspective of *the poet* as something that he himself receives. Delineating lyric as an

[97] Relevant here are Frances Ferguson's remarks in the *Solitude and the Sublime* about "the autonomy of aesthetics" that have "a harder time justifying their existence than food, shelter, and other material necessities for survival" but are "surely more troublesome than such merely willful and inconsiderate behavior is its peculiar encapsulation of purposeful action and perception of objects." In other words, what Ferguson calls "aesthetics," the blending of things and images, memories, of things, have more to do with the plenitude of how we see things and what constitutes meaningful action than brute physical reality—and I would add, loosen the direct hold of "food, shelter, and material necessities" by questioning the terms of their imposition upon us.

"impossible" space of fantasy already recognized to be so, enables Morton to elide the danger that hangs over Wordsworth's promise, that lyric is always an *exposure* to surprise, palpable its requisite vulnerability to be *impacted* by the slightest touch. My disagreement with Morton thus consists in his reading of the "future anterior" in Wordsworth's poems as what is always receivable as "crafted," not, for instance, as what Emily Rohrbach calls a "poetics of anticipation," of an "incompleteness" inherent in any construction of what "will have been."[98] [99]

Lyric becomes another instance of Morton's privileged metaphor, "a Möbius strip, a twisted band that appears only to have one side, where one would assume that it had two."[100] With the Möbius strip as a guiding metaphor, Morton also interprets the *truth of* Oedipus, not by thinking *with Oedipus who, in receiving the truth, becomes irrevocably blind* but only by inaugurating, through his own analysis, an Oedipus that survives the experience with both eyes: "As we have seen, this Möbius-strip-like collapse of the difference between the detective and the culprit reveal something about the agricultural society that Oedipus is charged with saving. Is it indeed the uncanny ploughing—based on the technological enframing of Earth as manipulable stuff, an enframing humans have perfected over the millennia—that is truly responsible for the Anthropocene that announces the collapse of this agricultural mode, its autoimmunity?"(*Oedipal* 16). Such a reading, Morton knows well, is only possible if he unifies "agriculture" conceptually

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[98] See for instance Morton's reading of "The Boy of Winander" that stresses: "In ambient poetics, the uncanny works such that the space-time of the text turns out to have changed, almost imperceptibly. We become attuned to this quality before the text is read, before it begins. *So the sense is that the change will have occurred*. This quality of future anteriority is built into the work-an uncannily proleptic backward glance. We get the uncanny sense that at some time in the unfolding of the text, we will look back and all will have changed. Like a loud sound heard from far away, the retroactivity effect in 'There was a Boy' makes sure that the poem is not just a plateau of tone"(*EWN* 75)

[99] See Morton, Timothy. The Oedipal Logic of Ecological Awareness" (*Environmental Humanities. Vo1. 2012*).12.and Rohrbach, Emily. *Modernity's Mist: British Romanticism and the Poetics of Anticipation.* (First edition. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[100]

under a single, continuous historical process, inaugurating with Morton's *Oedipus* an abstract subject that oversees this progression. Cognizant of the dangers of falling prey to Morton's own ironic use of myth, I am nevertheless tempted to observe in Morton's reading of *Oedipus* an echo of Oedipus's own blind, myth-making response to the Sphinx and within it, the shimmers of the numinous myth of "man" that Adorno and Horkeimer identified as subjective "mastery" that becomes domination by the abstract (Adorno & Horkeimer,). Yet if this is the measure of modernity's history, lyric temporality, itself episodic, and discontinuous, appears to offer a different way of receiving modernity's disclosures.

Morton's insistence on lingering with Romantic lyric works backwards from the impossible responsibility that modernity seeks to extract, a "responsibility" that insists upon the purification of rhetoric, the elimination of *resonances that,* for lyrical poetry, are very much the point. Nowhere is this more evident than in Morton's peculiar reading of the "*present"* of Wordsworthian lyric as a present constituted simultaneously by *loss and self-determination*. Morton presents this "melancholic" poetics as the basis for an ecological sensibility:

> …melancholy is more apt, even more ethically appropriate, to an ecological situation in which the worst has already happened, and in which we find ourselves, like Wordsworth's narrator, or a character in noir fiction, already fully implicated.…The moment of contact is always in the past. In this sense we never actually have it or inhabit it. We posit it afterward. An echo can only reach our ears after the sound has caused the medium to vibrate. (*EWN* 76).

Morton wants it both ways: for the past to address us as merely "an echo" and for us to be "fully implicated" in "the worst." Certainly, melancholy would be the prevailing ethos if apprehension were divided merely between "perceptual contact" and its echoes. Yet as Morton admits, "contact" here is a name for what only becomes manifest in speech and reverberates in the echo. Yet there is no reason why the accumulation of resonances, should be confined to melancholy. Given its belatedness, the figure of the echo emerges not as "full implication," but as something

more promiscuous. As Wordsworth famously proposes, observing about his self-presence in Book II of *The Prelude* that "often do I seem/ Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself or some other being"(II. 27-33), marking a history of the interruption of self-reconstitution, with something that "seems" to be "two."[101] What Derrida calls "*s'entendre parler,*" incurs a pleasing number of proliferating possibilities, of hearing oneself as another might, or alternatively, hearing another as if from within.[102] That Wordsworth's protagonists never recognize the "worst," even when they appear to reflect directly upon it, depends on shifting our emphasis away from a logic purely of loss*, of* neither "hav[ing] it" nor "inhabiting it" that would appear to *fix* an internal condition toward one that is syntactically generative, as if grappling with its manner introduces new histories. Circumstances, Wordsworth reminds us, are inseparable from the "circumstances of metre"(*LB* 107).

As I will contend, our "green" readings of the *Lyrical Ballads* have just begun to contour a manner of articulation that does not exert an either/or demand upon the present (complicit/non-complicit, blind/aware)*,* but transforms the habitual into a site of contingency, where becoming "implicated" in seemingly objective histories can also frustrate the discursive reproduction of the same, insisting upon rationality to remain accessible in other ways. This would go some way toward rendering "environmental" perspectives more with other discourses and less apt to

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[101] All quotations from the "Preface" are taken from *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802* (Ed. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Fiona J. Stafford. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
All quotations from poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* are taken from the *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800.* (Ed. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Dahlia. Porter, and Michael. Gamer. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008). Quotations from *the Prelude* are drawn from *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts*, *Context and Reception, Recent Critical Essays*. (Ed. J. W. Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen. Gill. New York: Norton, 1979).

[102] See for one instance Derrida, Jacques. *La Voix Et Le Phénomène: Introduction Au Problème Du Signe Dans La Phénoménologie De Husserl*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967.

reproduce certain seemingly impossible demands. As I see it, *e*nvironmentalism is accustomed to placing individuals in the impossible position of seeking, as Ulrich Beck puts it, "biographical solutions to systemic contradictions," where individuals are under immense pressure to embody an "ethics," reflected as "consumer," or "eco-consciousness" and tethered to concrete outcomes.[103] Such pressures tend to lead to absurd binaries where individuals are prompted to "accept" or "reject" environmentalism. Alternatively, I propose that attending to the lyric dimension of environmental description exerts a stuttering or imprecise attentiveness, a particular self-listening, that refutes the need for an independent, rationalizing ecological consciousness to transcend the "lyrical moment," preferring instead to stay *implicated.*

Language of Representation

As the Romantic criticism of recent decades attests, reading Wordsworth has become inseparable from a particular mode of socioeconomic secularization traceable through the disputed outcome of the French Revolution and its interruptive presence in British politics in the 1790s, the closing of the Commons, and the rise of Britain as the dominant imperial power. As the primers on Romanticism are apt repeat, reading Wordsworth's poetry concerns not only Romanticism's own critical legacy, but an abiding desire and inclination toward a totalizing history, a desire traceable to the late eighteenth century and perhaps exemplified by Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit.* The *Lyrical Ballads,* especially, is bound up with the "truth" of a materialist history traceable through Marx; as Jerome McGann proposes in *The Romantic Ideology,* "Romantic poetry and Romantic criticism as they have sought to define themselves

[103] See Beck, Ulrich. "Beyond class and nation: reframing social inequalities in a globalizing world," *Ulrich Beck: Pioneer in Cosmopolitan Sociology and Risk Society.* Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014. 685.

within a Post-Romantic Culture at large."[104] Seizing upon what appears to be generic evasions of a totalizing history, New Historicist readings now appear particularly vulnerable to the critique Eve Sedgwick levies at "paranoid readings," readings that affirms the "truth" of an ideological consciousness and the proliferation of epistemic positions that must be brought into the fold of history's correct dialectical realization. [105]

Yet this inclination toward a totalizing history persists in strategies of political activism and has seen its revival in ecocriticism owing to the unquestioning alignment of ecology with modernity. Here, I am not condemning the polemical mode of ecocriticism, but I question the *new manner in which climate change* figures a historical *horizon we must cross,* acceding to an abstract organizing principle truly capable of taking responsibility for the technological destructiveness of "modernization." Such an imperative derives its vitality from generating epistemic correctives to the generically inflected "I" designated as too "lyrical" or too "autobiographical," trapping and putting him in his historical place, re-orienting him toward the horizon of the "ecological." This way, becoming "modern" penetrates, and attempts to "activate" the discourse of the individual who does not know or is not sure what his relationship to the world is or what his obligations are.

As Michel Serres observes, the end of the eighteenth century presides over a series of "revolutions" exemplified by endeavors like Dennis Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie,* that sees the emergence, the cost of Paris as the center of a regional Enlightenment, the

[104] McGann, Jerome J. The Romantic Ideology: a Critical Investigation. Paperback ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. Ix

[105] See *Touching Feeling,* 123-152.

"emergence of a rational universal, a shared language."[106] According to Serres, this post-enlightenment division of the disciplines between the natural sciences and the humanities, obscures the pernicious usurpation of what we now call "literary" language. Insinuating into what belonged previously to poetry is a heuristic anthropology that fixes epistemic discourse to the universal deducibility of any epistemological position within a *lingua communis.* Given its composition in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, the *Lyrical Ballads, with its own kindred claims to universality,* reveals the sympathetic if uneasy position of English lyric vis-à-vis the ambition and reach of new, totalizing paradigms of knowledge and the capacity of knowledge-making itself to move, seemingly indiscriminately, between distinct anthropological discourses. The *Lyrical Ballads,* as Robert Mitchell attests, can be said to experiment "with the concept of experimentation itself," a claim that sees lyric poetry as manifesting "Aristotelian, Baconian, Royal Society or moral philosophical modes of experimentation."[107] Prompted by Mitchell, a more pertinent question for our purposes is what it would mean for the Lyrical Ballads to assert its own particular mastery, albeit confined and limited, of the discourses it inflects.

Unsettling Anthropologies

An emergent, empirical anthropological practice frames, for instance, Maureen McLane's observation that the *Lyrical Ballads* "situate[s] us in a discursive field generated in contest with

[106] See Serres, Michel., and Michel. Authier, eds. *A History of Scientific Thought: Elements of a History of Science.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995.

[107] Mitchell, Robert. Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

moral philosophy."[108] What are merely figures of "representation in conjectural histories (idiots, wild children), ethnological and travel narratives (the Indians), or political economical treatises (the aged, the poor)," become, in the *Lyrical Ballads*, "however problematical[ly]…subjects with voices, situations, histories." A central question for McLane is whether Wordsworth's interest in the plight of the vagrant or the Indian expands the *lingua communis* or, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge complains, merely attempts a "species of ventriloquism"(McLane 70) By posing the question between two alternatives, McLane invites us to wonder whether the unbridgeable gap between a voiceless vagrant and a well-to-do poet who commands language depends less on what a poem says than on the uncomfortable assumption of their mutual realization within an anthropological *frame.* If the *Lyrical Ballads* suggests the possibility of a "lingua communis," it equally *poses* Gayatri Spivak's pertinent concern that the very imperative, the insistence that subaltern to speak only reinforces "the intellectual within social capital" who wields the power to *compose the coherent experience of another.*

This realization of paradigms of rationalization coincides with the genealogy of representation Michel Foucault traces in *The Order of Things* and engages especially with Foucault's account of a representational hold upon the world achievable through the language of natural history. My intention here, again, is not to argue against Foucault but to reflect upon the repercussions of the manner in which the way the imperative toward "representational coherence," an imperative that grounds the construction of a positivist, scientific discourse, plays out in poetry. Here, I am echoing many critics, Theresa Kelley, Kevis Goodman, and many others who detect something suspicious in the requirement that science, in making use of poetic

[108] McLane Maureen N. *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.* 69. Hereafter cited in text.

language, must become a structure that *grounds* poetry.[109] Natural history, according to Foucault, exhibits certain anxieties over a discursive mastery that cannot dictate its own effects, that always risks *divulging the groundlessness of any claim to representation.* This anxiety, as I contended in the introduction, reverberates in the recent demand to represent the reality of "climate change" objectively lest literary language becomes "too" subjective and biographical, where ecological and geological coherence are essential to determining what kind of literature is "appropriate" to our times, aligning literature with the drive for widespread infrastructural development and mobilization that demands all humans turn "outwards," making themselves available and amenable to any task the collective demands.[110]

Let us look anew at how Wordsworthian observations about *poetry* alongside Michel Foucault's description of natural history, a mode of speech that locates coherence within a shared "patterning of experience"(*OT* 141). At first glance, Wordsworth's famous claim in the "Preface," that the *Lyrical Ballads* deploys "a selection of language really spoken by man" would appear to flirt with this universalizing tendency of the emerging disciplines (*LB 1802, 102*). Wordsworth's description raises the question of a "common language" defined, not only

[109] I am not saying, of course, that Foucault is wrong, only that poetry, insofar as it relies on verse and figure, can begin to piece together a different epistemology without indexing an objective discursive "pattern." For more on Foucault's comments on natural historical discourse and Romanticism, see Goodman, Kevis. "Conjectures on Beachy Head: Charlotte Smith's Geological Poetics and the Ground of the Present." (ELH, vol. 81 no. 3, 2014, pp. 983-1006),Kelley, Theresa M. *Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), and Jackson, Noel. "Archaeologies of Perception: Reading Wordsworth after Foucault," (*European Romantic Review*, 18:2, 175-185). Menely, Tobias. "Late Holocene Poetics: Genre and Geohistory in Beachy Head." (*European Romantic Review*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2017, pp. 307-314).

[110] Elizabeth Povinelli comments on the manner that such a fundamental debate should be taking place in the humanities when no one, it seems, sees "climate" as calling into question a particular subject-object relation. See Povinelli, 12-15.

by lowering the threshold for what qualifies as "man," but by insisting upon a "relation to man" based on the kind of "pleasure" that is possible only in poetry: "The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man"(105). Provisionally, a "lyrical" present of reading is intimately concerned with the possibility of a transmission, man to man, that is insistently *anti-disciplinary*, a "present" defined by what rhetorical readings have repeatedly stressed is a logic of transmission that does not belong to an external relation but remains proper to figure. Remarkably, Wordsworth emphasizes the experience of the scientist whose inquiry differs from the poet not in kind but in only scope. Wordsworth notes that "man of science" raises up "affection" in himself "through labour and length of time…by conversing with those particular parts of nature which are the objects of his studies"(112). Despite its specificity of inquiry, scientific observation is less a series of determinate subject-object relations than a fluid conversation that is habitual, that takes certain ways of knowing and not knowing for granted in its audience. Wordsworth subtly proposes that the repetition of empirical protocols are thus less important than their taking place over "time" with unspoken grounds for familiarity and saturated with the same "affection[s]" that discovers its yield in poetic utterance: "the impassioned expression" that is "the countenance of all science"(106)

Wordsworthian poetics thusly described, begins to empty out what for Foucault, underlies the possibility of a distinct natural-historical discourse, the necessity of a "pattern" that can be realized:

> But natural history cannot and should not exist as a language independent of all other languages unless it is a well-constructed language – and a universally valid one. In spontaneous and 'badly constructed' language, the four elements (proposition, articulation, designation, derivation) leave interstices open between them: individual

> experiences, needs or passions, habits, prejudices, a more or less awakened concentration, have established hundreds of different languages – languages that differ from one another not only in the form of their words, but above all in the way in which those words pattern representation. Natural history can be a well-constructed language only if the amount of play in it is enclosed: if its descriptive exactitude makes every proposition into an invariable pattern of reality (if one can always *attribute* to the representation what is *articulated* in it) and if the *designation* of each being indicates clearly the place it occupies in the general *arrangement* of the whole (*OT* 173).

Natural history sees the possibility of a "universally valid" language. Yet for Foucault, the patterning of experience, the capacity of language to *repeat* a representational pattern, is very much the point—even as it depends upon a significant amount of *"play" within a set of rules.* Although natural history as a discourse drops out of Foucault's genealogical history, the metaphor of a "game" with clear rules can be retraced through Foucault's account of contemporary power. In free-market participation, for instance, "action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than the participants."[111] Unlike mechanisms for disciplining the body, this "environmental technology" seeks to realize in the spatial dynamics of play, an "image, idea, or theme-program of a society" (*BB* 259). Yet for Wordsworth, poetry brings to focus, not "rules of play" that are economic or representational— both of which presuppose a dimension of language that must remain deeply impersonal— but in our familiarity *with* figure and verse, a familiarity with the word that enables the finesse and breadth of "affection" to be glimpsed even without *representation, stressing* aspects that often have little or nothing to do with the "object" but are nevertheless fundamental to discourse. Wordsworth emphasizes the way the descriptions of the scientist can inflect the "tastes" and "tendencies" by taking a certain familiarity for granted that may be more important than *realizing any discourse of* representation—where the "interstices" of prejudice and *individuality*, contingent upon "passion," begins to dispense with

[111] Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79. Ed. Michel.* Senellart. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 206

the representational matrix. This movement grants us the flexibility to discover a pleasing negativity through which we experience, as Anne-Lise François points out, " how little those objects that are literally present to us really say at any time, and how much the gaps underlying temporally precise moments really do."[112] That taking for granted someone else will understand what feels personal can also comprise an *assertion* of experience's accretion or repetition, of something having *occurred*.

Returning to McLane's suggestion of an emerging anthropological field in contest with moral philosophy, I propose rather that the *Lyrical Ballads* must be read against the manner in which figures like the "rustic," and the "child" come to be realized as "economic" or "developmental" positions in the material history. This way, we might see becoming "child" or "rustic" in *speech as enacting,* tracing a more diffuse *history of experience* defined by internal displacements that "forms of nature" only begin to index. Wordsworth explains his choice to focus on "low and rustic life" in the following way:

> …in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings; and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature (*LB* 97).

Wordsworth takes up "rustic" speech at a moment when the plight of the rustic is defined precisely *by the* economic history he is under pressure to reflect. As E.P. Thompson points out, it

[112]François, Anne-Lise. "To Hold in Common and Know by Heart: The Prevalence of Gentle Forces in Humean Empiricism and Romantic Experience." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1994, pp. 139

would have been commonplace to critique the "petty farmer" for his insularity, his poor understanding of debt structures and his having "no reverence for the opinions of the world."[113] Wordsworth embraces this insularity as a virtue, praising a speech that in particular, seems "under less restraint," that speaks a "plainer and more emphatic language."

If praising the "limited range" and the "necessary character of rural occupations" and the "beautiful and permanent forms of nature" risks sentimentalizing rural labor, Wordsworth also expresses *a* "manner" of marking accessibility of speech grounded only through "germination" of feeling within language, a manner that negates the adherence to a logic of economic unfolding that specifically requires that "rustics" become *individual* historical embodiments of what is disappearing, turning its back upon the present.[114] As Gillian Beer puts it in her aptly named essay "*Has Nature a Future?*" how things "will be (rather than should be) is not securely part of the idea of nature.…the future is only insecurely fastened to the natural."[115] Here, the "beautiful and permanent forms of nature" poses the uncomfortable question of whether the figure of "rural life," a figure so deeply mired in the tradition of poetic nature, can pass seamlessly into a figure

[113] Thompson, E. P. The Making of the English Working Class. London: V. Gollancz, 1963.

[114] I am thinking of Geoffrey Hartman's evocative description of Lucy's deaths in a series of poems as prophetic, a sign of the poet's "ecological distress." These comments appear to lament nature's inability to speak even silence or loss especially in extreme cases, where nature can only designate a mode of relation that immanently inheres in biochemical and geochemical reactions. Yet drawing on Raymond Williams's understanding of the ecological as a *corrective* to enlightenment dialectics, Hartman does not so much speak to the devastating historical disappearance of forests and meadows that is the direct consequence of industry but what he calls the "waning of the rural imagination," the disappearance of nature's ability to pass on what never comes into realization as the fruits of experience, the negative dimension of experience that makes a difference.

[115] See Beer, Gillian. "Has Nature a Future?" (*Shaffer, E. S., ed. The Third Culture: Literature and Science. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1998.*16).

for labor-relations, into a paradigm of deep history that requires truth to reside in the representation of the world that reflects the movement of capital.

Doubleness and Familiarity

All this sets up the *Lyrical Ballads* as poised upon a polarizing binary, either becoming "modern" or becoming fossilized counterpoint to modernity. Alan Bewell observes that the Lyrical Ballads exhibits a pervasive anxiety that in giving voice to liminal figures, the poet himself is becoming a marginal figure, the keeper of a specialized language,[116] At stake is the emergence of what Michel Serres describes as an universal anthropology reliant upon the "double experience" of observation, of "occupying all positions at the same time"(Serres). Not that of course, every "position" is held in the mind, but that any "position" is reachable through the flexibility of movement anchored in abstractions of sociohistorical determination. *The totalizing reach of this* doubleness resonates with what Foucault calls the "pattern" of "representation," a "pattern" that does not exist either in the mind or materially but depends on an extractable consensus, an anchoring visibily in the imaginary aggregate of all possible positions superimposed one upon the another. Attending to the lyric aspect of *environmental sensibility*, I contend, depends precisely upon countering both the assumption that lyric utterances have *no access to scientific insights* or conversely, that poetry mobilizes preexisting *scientific paradigms without changing them.*

The "doubleness" of infinite reach and accessibility that a universal science presupposes acquires in lyrical speech, an annihilating quality that *marks a history* defined by perceiving

[116] Bewell, Alan. *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

minute assertions of something *having happened,* assertions that we do not ourselves make, within any attempt to contour an "object" relation. In situating itself within the quotidian, the "Preface" of the *Lyrical Ballads* proposes a poetry that does not repeat the "speech of common life" but it also injects "dissimilitude…sufficient for granting pleasure to the *rational* mind" (*LB* 103). If dissimilitude engages the analytical or reasoning powers, incurring the pleasure of knowledge grasped, "dissimilitude within similitude," holds together an experience constituted by *the assertion of something having transpired*. Wordsworth famously claims that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility"(111). Poetry *re-collects by* receiving as "*kindred* to that which was before the subject of contemplation," enabling a unity held by joining two moments in time "gradually produced and does itself actually exist in the mind." Thus it derives its unfolding through syntactical grammatical instantiation of something having been recollected and not something directly perceived. In "describing any passions whatsoever" the sense of something "voluntarily described," that earns "the sense of difficulty overcome," deriving from "previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction"(111). The cadences of quotidian life nevertheless provide "an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language *closely resembling* that of real life," a sense of evading the directional energies engaged by a *logic of representation* (For this dematerialization, Hazlitt offers the rather suggestive image of dematerializing substitution by way of the "food in our mouths" somehow become "sentiments" out of them).

Lily Gurton-Wachter describes this as a kind of "vigilance," grouping Wordsworth with theorists of the will like William James or Ralph Waldo Emmerson for whom perception is a

question of effort.[117] The key is maintaining consciousness in the "intervals between attention," when "the organs of attention" are "relaxed" letting moments blend into one another (Gurton-Wachter 29). Gurton-Wachter takes as her emblem De Quincey's description of Wordsworth with his ear pressed to the earth, listening for the mail-carrier, a kind of "awaiting-arrival by attending to what is close"(85). This figure of awaiting what is in the distance doubles as a powerful allegory for "*resemblance"* through feeling, where spreading two moments across an earthly surface enables the immediate *availability of an emotional "ground"* to remain between two instead of ascending to a higher level of abstraction where both become fungible positions.

By attending to this "shared ground" of emotional resemblance, we might look anew at Wordsworth's description of "habits of mind" so deep that they become an "organic sensibility":

> For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings ; and as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act feelings connected with important subjects will be nourished, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much organic sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced that by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, his taste exalted, and his affections ameliorated (*LB* 98).

Organic sensibility famously derives from discursive "habits" that are "blind" and "mechanical," yet as the Lyrical Ballads suggest, this accessibility is unlikely to yield cognitive certainties. "Utter[ing] sentiments" do not secure as much as annihilate the contents of what is communicated so that the "being whom we address" becomes "enlightened" and refined in taste

[117] Gurton-Wachter, Lily. *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016. Hereafter cited in text.

and affection. Wordsworthian "organic sensibility" comes into relief in the New Historicist critics who see poetic pleasure as a discipline that conceals the ideological operations of language under the guise of what is simply "natural." David Simpson , for instance, writes that for Wordsworth, "authentic pleasure" derives from the bonds cultivated by hardship and the "strenuous effort" of "undivided labor in a pre-commercial phase" (Simpson 64). Simpson goes on to claim that for Wordsworth, language is "not a thing in itself, but an expression and an embodiment of an entire way of life" (Simpson 64).[118] James Chandler cites Edmund Burke as the presiding influence for an *opus* that "is supposed to bear the stamp of its author's disciplined character and to embody the purposes that reside in the habits of his mind."[119]

Yet even here, the surprisingly low threshold Chandler and Simpson sets for what it means to "embody" a purpose, *a* "supposed" *telos* that can neither be guaranteed, or even "urged upon" any reader, already inflects the *difference between a representational matrix realizable through empirical discourses and* Wordsworthian pedagogy. In a poetry of "second nature," the "author refrains from urging his own purposes," opening the habitual to "both the demands of the rhetorical situation" and admitting "the degree to which those specific purposes must be concealed from his readers, perhaps even from himself"(Chandler xix). It is worth noting, even within Chandler's prose, how close unknowingly embodying a material-ideological purpose comes, with an adjustment of our gaze, to *consciously guiding the realization of ideology* through the claims of the "rhetorical situation," into *expressions* that are for Wordsworth, intimately concerned *with* an emotional history. The material-economic or secularizing context

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[118] Simpson, David. *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement*. New York: Methuen, 1987. Hereafter cited in text.

[119] Chandler, James. Wordsworth's Second Nature: a Study of the Poetry and Politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Xix.

through which we read Wordsworth therefore enables us to observe a different way of "constituting" an epistemic position based around pleasure.

Elizabeth Povinelli argues that "the question is not whether these meteorological and geological forms of existence are playing a part in the current government of the demos. Clearly they already do, economically, politically, and socially. The question is what role has been assigned to them as they emerge from a low background hum to making a demand on the political order"(Povinelli 142-3). By contrast, Wordsworth's ease of access to "meteorological and geological" denies that they *must be assigned places within a specific, overriding discourse* to matter.[120] The freedom to solicit a "cloud" or a "flower" in the *Lyrical Ballads* (to "wander lonely *as* a cloud," to address Lucy as the "loveliest flower") unfolds, not *"patterns" of representation that must be taken on aggregate to be understood, but a poetic* familiarity that in its ability to receive whomever reads it, insists upon its *particularity of signification* within the tendency toward categorization or systematization.[121]

Counting, Placing

In the *Lyrical Ballads,* ostensible natural forms, a thorn or a flower, slips, not into the pleasures of Linnaean taxonomy or scientific observation, but through the psychic resistance against the very empirical project of description of an empirical frame*,* (the speaker in "The Thorn" who insists on measuring a pond to be the size of a child's coffin, or the child of "We are

[120] Frédéric Neyrat for instance, points us to the fiction

[121] Here, we might look to Geoffrey Hartman's abiding commitment to a power that grows downwards and Anne-Lise François's writings on what in agriculture constitutes work that "vanishes" in our hands. I would add Luce Irigaray who proposes that the "pastoral," through the many displacements it accommodates, become "meeting points" for diverse histories, and that this is what Wordsworth himself enables in his

Seven" that "counts" her siblings even when they are not there).[122] What I wish to propose in my readings is less Povinelli's concern about the "thanatotropic" effects of the ruthless exclusion deployed by contemporary rationalizing logic, but the ease with which lyrical moments intrude into empirical discourse that by attempting to cut a slice of universal time, all but invites them. They activate *an* insistence upon specificity and particularity of histories and I think, bringing out the "weakly" emancipatory aspect of secular thought. [123]

To provide one brief example, we need only to look to the more "pedagogical" poems of the *Lyrical Ballads, "*We Are Seven*.*" The gesture of counting with a child typically contains the implicit, pedagogical purpose of redirecting the child to the adult's perspective. In "counting" her dead siblings among the "seven," the poem appears to exemplify Barbara Johnson's point about the way "that personification gives us conventionalized access to the boundary between life and death which Wordsworth, by repressing explicit personification, uncovers in a more disquieting way."[124] The little maid meets the adult's inquiry "How many may you be," with a clear-sighted demonstration of arithmetic knowledge that also unfolds an order of death: "The first that died was sister Jane" then "My brother John was forced to go."[125] This very act of

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[122] See also Foucault's account of Linnaean categorization in *Order of Things.*

[123] Many critics Lauren Berlant, Eric Santner, and Sara Guyer to name a few have taken issue with the conflation of individual and political sovereignty in Foucault's work. Santner in particular queries whether there is a really a definitive break between Foucault's. Spivak notes presciently that the "*impact"* of the conflation between "subject" and "individual" have perhaps intensified in

[124] Johnson, Barbara. *The Barbara Johnson Reader: the Surprise of Otherness.* Ed. Melissa Feuerstein. Duke University Press: Durham ; London, 2014. 52

[125] "The first that died was sister Jane;
In bed she moaning lay,
Till God released her of her pain;
And then she went away.

"So in the church-yard she was laid;
And, when the grass was dry,

counting each death, one that acknowledges the factual order of death in order to arrive at a chronology of the present and that subtly anticipates her own death, actively resists the adult's demand not to "count" her siblings anymore ("But they are dead; those two are dead!"). That the dispute over "how many" is at its core a dispute, not only over what *counts as "counting," but* how counting does not merely transmit an analytical fact but distills a history, a movement from past to present over which the dead have a claim. An accumulation of euphemistic clarifications ("their spirits are in heaven!") only entangles the speech of the adult with the speech of the girl. Here, the adult's "lesson" that offers the distinction between life and death not only precludes the development of the little girl in*to* an adulthood that knows categorically the difference but entangles analytic act of counting with the nonfungible "order" of her siblings and their deaths, an order that "counts" death as part of her life and what awaits her.[126]

Wordsworth's fidelity to the habitual is less a question of what is intrinsically slow in nature than "resemblances" of emotion that can yield a uniquely rhetorical *becoming* proper to

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Together round her grave we played,
My brother John and I.

"And when the ground was white with snow,
And I could run and slide,
My brother John was forced to go,
And he lies by her side."(*LB 101*)

[126] Originally, I was quite opposed to thinking, as Marjorie Levinson does by drawing on philosophies of Benedict Spinoza, what might be called *shifts* in form. Her essay "Of Being Numerous" articulates shifting systems of counting based on the changing terms of resemblances, remarking "it is the strange crossings of life with not-life and the strangely totalizing perspective of the present that alienate our commonsense experience of ourselves and reveal nature that is anything but natural, a nature that is…deep inside us and all our inventions." I think I understand more clearly what Levinson is attempting to convey by pointing to the self-alienating manner of counting differently, a manner that enables alleviation *from* our own entrenched psychic commitments. Yet I would still insist that what matters here is not "alienation" only but the pedagogical interaction between the two interlocuters, the frustrated epistemologies of the adult that are precisely not common sense but acquire the feeling of being imposed.

empirical rationalism that challenges the universalizing *logic* that emerges from it, that demonstrates command over absence and presence, the dead and the living. The logic of "counting" unfolds the question of "how many" there are; in answering this question, the girl neither counts wrongly nor the confuses the difference between what is dead and what is living. Rather, the possibility of counting *grants her siblings a place within her language and* subverts the adult's need to know; here the very need to proceed first through abstraction, insisting upon only couting the living, would bring *disorder* to the girl's need to arrive at her ordered place within the family. More than pitting one understanding against another, what is foregrounded is a pedagogical scene with that refuses to absolve with the integration of the *girl into regular development and* herself into a *discursive position.* We have instead a scene that provides opens the metaphysical logic of absence and presence into an unnecessary *insistence,* injecting it with the sense of having been dislodged, *rendered* pathological in its *necessity and its refusal of a place to the dead.* Conversely, the logic of counting is itself rendered less *universalizable,* incapable of reaching broadly, but *bound inextricably, as if by rustic ritual, to context.*

What Remains

Such social anxieties present in *Lyrical Ballads* enable us to look anew at scenes of agrarian life that appear, to modern eyes, littered with through-lines of modernization and industrialization and for Timothy Morton, implicates subjectivity in an irrevocable history of ecological destruction. And yet, as I hope to propose to demonstrate, the question of implication itself extends far beyond *a particular history*. Similarly, tracing an *ecological* sensibility need not be merely be a pressure to "face up" to an overdetermined economic history, but rather, a

question of negotiating the exigencies of its perception by staying, provisionally, with the spatialized narratives of the pastoral.

An important correlative to this chapter, then, is a manner of shifting the emphasis of certain "traumatic" readings that have recently come to frame how we approach the *Lyrical Ballads.* Poems like "Simon Lee" and "Michael," in particular, have become privileged objects for articulating a historical cleavage within discourse, where the "impact*" of* the rapid expansion of manufacturing capacity, enclosures, and land monopoly and the abstract "logic" of capital that intrude into the pastoral speech. We need not claim scenes of agrarian life as purely constitutive of an experience of the "rustic," or the "oppressed" of history as part of "ever-wider domains of experience under systemic control," but rather, as the strange reconstitution of interstices of familiarity that stress their accessibility along with irrevocable alterations that must be heard, reconstituted, and never taken for granted as teleological.

Romanticism thus engages remain amenable to *re-orienting a failure to "come to terms"* into an affirmation of the terms of history. Thomas Pfau, drawing on Cathy Caruth's account of trauma, construes Wordsworthian lyric *as* a traumatic "disturbance in the subject" enabled by the very structure of the lyric dyad intended to shelter him.[127] [128] "Michael" exemplifies for Pfau the

[127] Pfau, Thomas. *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840.* Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. See also Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience : Trauma, Narrative, and History*. (Twentieth Anniversary edition. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016)

[128] I think Pfau's reading does not give enough to the possibility of a *different past* that Caruth's account of trauma *traces within and as an* encounter: "It is this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken (to awaken, indeed, to a burning), that resonates in different ways throughout the texts this book attempts to read, and which, in this book's understanding, constitutes the new mode of reading and of listening that both the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand"(Caruth 9). As I understand it, Caruth's theory concerns the possibility of a *history that commands us to hear it, witness it,* not an inevitable historical *movement,* and this is difficult to see in Pfau's reading.

exposure of the individual to a history that can only be grasped in the *imperative to awaken,* that the readings of the poem facilitate. The number of farm closures reached their apex during the Romantic period and poems like "Michael" plausibly reflect Wordsworth's own attempts to grasp the changing financial structures and the movement of capital, or as Pfau puts it, borrowing Wordsworth's vernacular, the "changes wrought by Adam Smith's 'invisible hand.'" Pfau writes: "the pastoral at once perpetrates the very illusion from which Michael must awaken, and in the course of the narration proper, evolves into the medium that precipitates that awakening"(221). The difficult part, I would contend, is determining whether the parable of Michael is enjoining the reader to "awaken to" or "awaken from" an abstract economy. Armed now with Marx and hindsight, the temptation would be to lay claim to the revelatory teleology of reading, a binding relation between poet and reader that reveals the truth of Marx's vision. Yet the *telos of* awakening to "economic shift" *must simultaneously take* seriously the titular claims for a carefully crafted "pastoral poem," that stresses an aching familiarity that unfolds through the poem. The seemingly guileless *lyrical "lightness" that risks exposure to historical,* appears to assert a different history within the "abstract organization," the hand of capital by deliberately insistence upon the confined perceptibility of the organizing force it provides to subtend the pastoral.

Kevis Goodman groups Wordsworth among the "georgic moderns" for whom the pastoral mode acts as a "shield against sensory overextension…that is also an aperture, that discloses the pressures it might seek to recover."[129] Like Pfau, Goodman focuses the placidity of pastoral elements as what shelters as it discloses "pressures," inducing a stutter or disturbance

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[129] Goodman, Kevis. *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History.*Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Hereafter cited in text. 12

that introduces the possibility of a "history." Goodman's account is compelling, but the metaphor of sensory "over-extension," I think, privileges the act of disclosure by polarizing the "shock" of history and the placid denial of the lyric as a distinct *teleology,* treating lyric as the outer membranes of an organism, defined by its proximity to an external, material history it takes inside. My concern is that by constituting history as a "disturbance" where what is material punctures the *protective layers* of *poetry*.[130]

With this adjusted gaze, we might look anew at the final stanza of Wordsworth's "Michael" by sticking as closely as possible to Wordsworth's method:

> Three years, or little more, did Isabel,
> Survive her Husband: at her death the estate
> Was sold, and went into a Stranger's hand.
> The Cottage which was nam'd The Evening Star
> Is gone, the ploughshare has been through the ground
> On which it stood; great changes have been wrought
> In all the neighbourhood, yet the Oak is left
> That grew beside their Door; and the remains
> Of the unfinished Sheep-fold may be seen
> Beside the boisterous brook of Green-head Gill (482-491). [131]

Failing to pass his livelihood to his son, Michael dies leaving the sheep-fold unfinished, yet pastoral narrative persists beyond his death to an environmental relation with the village and estate. The reference to "changes…wrought" certainly qualify as "euphemistic," and the poem certainly registers the "threat" that Kevis Goodman notes, hovers over Wordsworth's most tranquil passages about "the calm of nature" and over "Michael" more generally (Goodman 139).

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[130] See for instance Goodman's interpretation of Raymond Williams's concept of history "in solution" and the organization of history according to "emergent," "dominant," and "residual." My view comes close to Goodman's, but I am not sure *lyric* epistemology must be read as constituting of a distilled history of precipitates or a defensive shield. Rather, I think, instead, of gestures of integration, of contouring a whole, that can begin to be heard as a historical reconstitution that is frail, reflexive, and coming to terms.

[131] *LB,* 398.

Yet equally worth noting is the askance, halting movement from the "survival" of Isabel, to the "stranger's hand" to what is simply "left." Insistent upon finding something on which the pastoral narrative may lean, the speaker's account may be read as an inability to grasp that the deed is done, and the lot has exchanged hands. Grappling with a yet to be measured loss, the stanza nevertheless cannot be reduced to "mere mourning," that laments the ephemerality of human life and private possessions. Instead language of inheritance *acquires surprising depth* in the redundant qualification of an estate "sold" as what "went into a Stranger's hand.*"* Disposing with an estate is typically figured as a sovereign act of the market, yet its *finality* remains difficult to distinguish from the pastoral metaphor of merely passing hand to hand. The tentativeness in the passive voice registers, not an impulse to deny the brutally economic, but a violence palpable within the conflation of denial and *non-understanding,* of a master-discourse that precisely exerts its force *by* reinterpreting the unsuccessful clarification of what selling as an act of denial, obliterating other attachments and genealogies that begin to emerge from non-understanding.

Pastoral lyric nevertheless *prevents economic from taking hold by* bringing it to the surface by refuting its "deep" reality . To recollect that the cottage "was named The Evening Star" cushions the shock of what "is gone," but asserts the act of "naming" cannot be reversed by the *fait accompli* of its razing. Similarly, observing that the ploughshare had erased all traces of the physical cottage does not prevent the cottage from resurfacing as an appendage to the "ground/On which it [the cottage] stood," prompting a double-take that accentuates its absence.[132] Fastening our attention upon the topography of the village, recounting what "has

[132] Sara Guyer's reading of Clare's lyrical "I" reveals a condition that is essentially poetic—that dramatizes a *failure* to mark both the diminishing viability of the land for subsistence living and the experience of living on it. I agree when she writes, "If displacement is displacement, if it reveals that home is or always can become unrecognizable, if it teaches us that the familiar is no longer distinct

been through the ground" and that "changes have been wrought" stays insistently within the deflationary confinement of changes to "the neighborhood." The capacity to acknowledge finite changes, asserts a not so much a denial of the expanse of capital, but *insists upon* how violent changes are *preserved in the familiar,* within the constitution of "the neighborhood" and accentuated by heterogeneity of space everywhere felt. At stake in the stanza, appears to be less the inability to "come to terms" than the pressures within the lyric, "socio-economic forces" but that forces are not abstractly part of an organization, but distilled within an emotional history.

Temporalization of the "pastoral" and the socioeconomic, that the demands of the latter outstrip the form, would appear to endorse the Raymond Williams's description of the pastoral as a mode of apprehension that is "receding, moving away to a past which only a few surviving signs, and the spirit of poetry, could recall." [133] This "receding" of the pastoral *into history* obscures the "pastoral" as itself a confrontation *with finitude* within more abstract forms of thinking. By turning our attention to the "oak" and the "Sheep-fold," "Michael" enacts what Sara Guyer calls "an effort to stay with, to recognize, and even to accentuate, when needed, what remains" (Guyer 7). The proprietorial lineage discovers a point of rest at the Oak that "is left" when the cottage no longer stands before culminating in the unfinished "Sheep-fold," the reminder of the broken patrilineal line. In an ecocritical reading, the lines, "yet the Oak is left/That grew beside the Door" might signify nature's resilience or a boundary that delineates what can and cannot be an object of exchange. But the "yet" after the caesura initiates a more

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from the strange, the continuous logic that has been important to identifying the psychic effects of poverty, labor, and contingency is untenable." However, it is important to distinguish Wordsworth *from* Clare, whose displacements occur always *within* a context of attempting to grasp a place, they do not preclude the accessibility of the place *as* "familiar" but rather, insist upon the constitution of the *familiar,* of Michaels' "blind" love as *historical.*

[133] Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.130

complex kind of continuity between past and present expressed in the oak's inability to *fit* into either the hereditary model of inheritance or the model of contractual exchange. No longer the "Clipping Tree," the semantic invocation of "oak" in the poem already marks the tree apart from the language of Michael and his family. Yet the explicit reference to its presence as the oak "that grew beside their Door," also holds together *mere* contiguity with growth in a way Luke's truncated development could not. The intransigence of the oak that lingers in the poem after the disappearance of the cottage points to a "growth" no different from spatial contiguity and withdraws from both the arc of unfulfilled patrilineal obligations and rules of exchangeability determined by the market. The past-tense "grew," we might say, marks the completion of its social role apart from a growth that may continue but *address as what "did grow."*
The speaker's bereft narrative is neither sentimental attachment nor a proprietary *claim,* but an assertion *of material history* against the tendency toward abstract historicization. What Anne-Lise François describes as the passage from what is only provisionally available and what is "no longer of use."[134]

Environmental Echoes

Finally, the contrasting presence of Foucault in this chapter mode of *reading* has served, in some ways, to guide poetic form away from a version of natural historical "representation," precisely because Wordsworth stresses experience as displacements within language that reconstitute the familiar and not as a cumulative "middle." This also Denise Gigante theorizes the Romantic understanding of life as an ever-present power, noting that "power, even when in

[134] See "To Hold in Common and Know by Heart: The Prevalence of Gentle Forces in Humean Empiricism and Romantic Experience." and "Untouched by Morning/And Untouched by Noon': Succession without Sequel."

balance, is still power, and the slightest alteration in circumstance or environment could set that power in unpredictable motion."[135] Drawing on the epigenetic models of organic development, Gigante calls this poetics of life *ontopoiesis* (Gigante 165). Gigante's "ontopoiesis" conflates *being* and poetic *creation* yet as we see for Wordsworth, the pleasure of poetry consists in what is *recollected* and what refuses to be integrated into the "flux" of *pattern*.[136] Attending to this difference accounts for one of Wordsworth's more enigmatic formulations, when in "Tintern Abbey" he writes of a moment of retreat from the "unintelligible world": "…We are laid to sleep /In body, and become a living soul: While with an eye made quiet by the power/ Of harmony, and the deep power of joy/ We see into the life of things"(lines 46-49).[137] To see into the "life of things" would in one interpretation entail, as Denise Gigante puts it, "above all a condition of power," an animating power that lives beneath the skin of life and that appears to animate verse. Yet this "slightest alteration in circumstance or environment" if we attempt to think in Wordsworthian terms, does not conjure up the monstrous manifestations of organic life pressing through the dermis, but the *familiar question of* emotional impact, of what perturbs and disturbs within *experience, transforming it into a question of depth* of a "place." Always reflexively conceived as what has "altered," requires as Wordsworth contends, that we are "laid to asleep/in body," where seeing into the life of things is to linger *with a blinding resemblance,* constituted by fragile alterations and not to uncover a vital power within.

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[135] Gigante, Denise. Life: Organic Form and Romanticism. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. 2-3

[136] Relevant here is Robert Mitchell's discussion of the *Lyrical Ballads* as joining "Baconian" and "neo-Aristotelian" approach to experimentation, interested in "how things tend to happen" as defined by in reference to unique events. Here, the meaning of an event can be spread along a duration or alternatively, viewed as a singular event.

[137] *LB* 144.

Here, I turn to one of Wordsworth's more peculiar poems, "Simon Lee," partly because it exemplifies in method what Wordsworth's emptying out, one that far from . Wordsworth reflects upon the manner in which "the incidents of ordinary life" become available to reflection upon their historicity. Often read as an expression of the limits to the period's circulations of sensibility as "gratitude" and "sentiment," the plight of Simon Lee expresses, like its "mature" counterpart "Michael," appears to witness the Enclosure Acts and the disappearance of agrarian life.[138] What many critics have identified as the three layers of "Simon Lee" are marked by two incidents of what might be called, changes to an "environment," though in both incidents, the referent of "what" exactly is survived is perhaps subordinated to the mode of perception into which it becomes drawn.

In the first movement, we are introduced to the old huntsman Simon Lee, who dwells in the "sweet shire of Cardigan" and whom we are told, is a "little man," who "once was tall," a figure already marked by the physical qualities of aging written as an inverted developmental trajectory. Simon Lee is from the onset difficult to distinguish from the "sweet shire" where he lives:

> No man like him the horn could sound,
> And hill and valley rang with glee
> When Echo bandied, round and round
> The halloo of Simon Lee.
> In those proud days, he little cared
> For husbandry or tillage;
> To blither tasks did Simon rouse
> The sleepers of the village.
>
> He all the country could outrun,
> Could leave both man and horse behind;
> And often, ere the chase was done,
> He reeled, and was stone-blind.

[138] For readings of Simon Lee that stress the poem's participation in discourses of sentiment and manners, see in addition toMaureen McLane, Nancy Yousef's *Romantic Intimacy,*

> And still there's something in the world
> At which his heart rejoices;
> For when the chiming hounds are out,
> He dearly loves their voices! (9-24)[139]

The first few stanzas in "Simon Lee" are, in many ways, about the "sound" of poetic language. Simon Lee is himself defined by "the horn" he "sound[s]" and the "halloos" that "bandied round and round." The soundscape of hill and valley overlays "voices" elevated above the village and that never coincide with the seasonal, earthly tasks of "tillage" and "husbandry." The figure of the "voice," in other words, not only suggestively, partially disintegrates with the "sounds" of the village but vertically layers echo upon echo, giving Simon Lee's experience a certain temporal depth. Here, Barbara Johnson's remarks about the "Boy of Winander" as a poem about apostrophe proves equally illuminating for the opening stanzas of Simon Lee:

> Apostrophe provides the poet with two immediate advantages, the second of which is seldom seen as such: (1) it brings the whole surrounding world into the speech event, and (2) it simplifies the poet's grammar. Instead of staging something (as one would have to do in description), the implicit whole sentence is stripped down, as if the poet were ringing each entity like a bell as he speaks of it; as if that *were* the poetic experience and not a condition for it. The poetic performance suggests not that the poet is more intense than other people but actually that he says less. The thought he utters is not X is Y but "I invoke X."(8-9)[140]

Simon Lee's "halloos" set the valley ringing, and as Johnson's metaphor of bell subtly suggests, this ringing has the effect of emptying, creating space—that relays both the space of the valley itself and the indeterminate temporal duration of Simon Lee's inattentiveness to the rhythms of seasonal and economic time marked by the tasks of "husbandry and tillage." As the stanza describes Simon Lee's habitual participation in his master's hunt, the social scene never tapers to

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[139] *LB* 95.

[140] Johnson, Barbara. *Persons and Things*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008.

the rhythms of grounded life but to Simon Lee "out run[ning]" the village, both man and horse. Even when he "reeled, and was stone-blind," it is the "voices" of the hunt that sustain the vague presence of "something in the world/ At which his heart rejoices." The presence of the valley itself therefore, only comes to focus in the ringing of voices.

The "speech event" moves from the multiplicity of voices and echoes into the lyric with a drop, from the "Halloos" of Simon Lee to the lyrical "oh" in the ensuing stanza:

> But, oh the heavy change!—bereft
> Of health, strength, friends, and kindred, see!
> Old Simon to the world is left
> In liveried poverty.
> His Master's dead—and no one now
> Dwells in the Hall of Ivor;
> Men, dogs, and horses, all are dead;
> He is the sole survivor (25-32).

Simon Lee is drawn from balladic time into the social time of "incidents," of both what may be described as "ordinary life" that already, Wordsworth's speaker reminds us, the site of a "heavy change"—where Simon Lee becomes the "sole survivor." Yet in becoming "bereft," the series of negations in the stanzas, "bereft of health," "no one now/ dwells," begin to construct not so much narrative of Simon Lee or indeed the material poverty that befell the valley but affords *even more weight* to the interiority of the speaking subject that depends on a series of displacing echoes of the previous stanzas already marks absence—with *their* absence. The experience the poem conveys, the passage from a vibrant valley to a valley bereft of life then, depends not on the disappearance of any particular *thing,* but on the displacement of the echoes that marked what was itself a blind joy—the mere sound of "voices" enough to sustain a world.

Yet if Simon Lee is the "sole survivor," the changes in the village that come to inhere in the change in his body make manifest not only the effects of aging or rural labor but an aging

that appears to transform himself into a *text* for bereavement and mourning, ready for others to see:

> And he is lean and he is sick;
> His body, dwindled and awry,
> Rests upon ankles swoln and thick;
> His legs are thin and dry (33-6).

The adjectives applied to Simon Lee, "dwindled" and "awry," "thin" and "dry" can be easily applied to the limbs of trees around him. The implication in the successive stanzas is the more he labors, the more like the "stump of rotten wood" he becomes. The metrical limitations and thematic conventions of balladic stanza eschews suggestions of a mythical, Ovidian transformation or the alteration of the body as the explicit markings of power, the "becoming root" of Simon Lee intertwines and begins to reflect upon the condition of the *valley,* stalling the poem's movement, and calling into question what the reader can make of this intertwining text. Becoming "dwindled" and "awry" and the swelling of his ankles, through their repetition, gathers the energies of the poem:

> This old Man doing all he could
> To unearth the root of an old tree,
> A stump of rotten wood.
> The mattock tottered in his hand;
> So vain was his endeavour,
> That at the root of the old tree
> He might have worked for ever (73-80).

Yet if "Simon Lee," an unwitting figure of "bereavement" that becomes, like the *pastoral* text around him, a mere cypher, then *becoming* "thin" and "awry" cannot but make him a cypher for the *feeling of the land*, preserving in his uncanny body the alterations to the village that become *palpable,* if their transformation was never visible. Clare's lyrical "I" reveals a condition that is

essentially poetic—that dramatizes a *failure* to mark both the diminishing viability of the land for subsistence living and the experience of living on it.[141]

Here, it is important to note that the effect of balladic repetition also differs from the *lyric* melancholy that defines "Michael" and Clare's most critically praised pieces. The alteration in perspective, the *becoming text* of Simon Lee, holds an "impasse" that also makes a kind of questionable, sympathetic engagement possible. The speaker interjects in order to reflect upon Simon Lee and his companion Ruth, and the sheer littleness of their labor:

> And, though you with your utmost skill
> From labour could not wean them,
> 'Tis little, very little—all
> That they can do between them (53-6).

The address acts partially as an aside to the reader, remarking upon the narrative impasse of a couple intertwined around the tense of the landscape, a "vain" labor both stalls the couples' death and sustains them, giving them a kind of "life." Yet the disappearance of the labor, its reduction to "littleness" becomes overlaid with the task of "unearth-[ing]" so that the endless task of deracination, of severing of the "root" itself or becoming un-rooted, becomes the site of the poem's energies, a process of traumatic working through of Simon Lee and Ruth's own un-rooting. Wordsworth's verb "wean[ing]" suggests that the "vain" labor becomes a kind of dependency, where the aged couple acquire the qualities of infant life discernible in the "littleness" of their labor. Yet such a "little" life does not diminish or disappear into the landscape but like the reappearance of the "thorn" draws out the strange relation of the poem to

[141] In her compelling account of John Clare, Sara Guyer makes a case for the convergence of Clare's self-understanding, one of "disorientation" at repeated displacements, and what Robert Nixon observes as "a more radical notion of displacement, that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and the resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in place stripped of the very characteristics that make it inhabitable"(Guyer, 82).

its object of interest—why does the speaker suggest we should "wean" the couple from their labor?

The stuttering repetition "Tis little, very little"—a continued reflection on narrative impasse of the poem—amplifies its energies, and begins to give the "little" labor an infant life of its own, revising an aged couple well living beyond their reproductive fertility into a figure of infant life. The sense of diminishment overlaid with nourishment revises the endless "un-rooting" into a kind of "rooting," an attachment to a *place* through a relation of utter dependency. This revision of a surviving but moribund life into an infant one, a severing into an attachment does not itself have a referent—it is not exactly an assemblage of couple and wood—nor does it correspond to any biological or chemical change in the natural surroundings, but it is, nevertheless, a poetic association encouraged to make through "echoes" of familiarity that accrue through the poem.

The dash that succeeds the stuttering repetition rushes, one might say, to dash the suggestion of an infant life but instead re-marks with residual, even euphemistic ambiguity the "all" that is "between them." That a wayward "root" or an un-rooting becomes a "little" life, a life not born but rather, regressed into a new attachment to un-rooting itself, enables us to glimpse the kind of emergent, dependent social condition that becomes *poetically* sensible even as it eludes the economic forms of determination that arduous labor would suggest. [142]

[142] Relevant here might be Luce Irigaray 's formulation about the relation of our "rootedness" to vegetal life:"Our first taking root is, in fact, relational: conceived by two, we start living in our mother and are linked to her through the umbilical cord. In reality, it is a little more complicated: the umbilical cord connected us with our placenta, which acted as a mediator between our mother and ourselves, notably at a hormonal level. The question of our own roots is, thus, complex, and this explains the numerous myths regarding our origin, but also our constant attempts to provide us with constructed roots in order to master that which escapes us as our natural commencement, given that we have to face both dependence and uprooting."

The poem's refusal to pursue the hints at an infant life underscores the surprise of the succeeding stanza when the speaker turns away from the "littleness" between Simon Lee and Ruth to address the reader anew:

> My gentle Reader, I perceive
> How patiently you've waited,
> And now I fear that you expect
> Some tale will be related (61-4).

The mannered gesture of "respect" to the reader is also a gesture of retroactive erasure of the experience the preceding stanzas seek to convey, distilling the reading itself into a mode of "waiting" that still anticipates that a "tale will be related." The final event conveys

> One summer-day I chanced to see
> This old Man doing all he could
> To unearth the root of an old tree,
> A stump of rotten wood.
> …….
>
> "You're overtasked, good Simon Lee,
> Give me your tool," to him I said;
> And at the word right gladly he
> Received my proffered aid.
> I struck, and with a single blow
> The tangled root I severed (73-6, 81-8).

The aid that the speaker "proffer[s]" is not, in itself worthy of mention but depends, as Wordsworth reminds us in the "Preface," on the "feeling" of the "situation." The very catharsis toward which the insistent metrical repetitions build, the frustration of labor itself registers, hints at a *violent rejection of "un-rooting"* by severing the root entirely. The cutting of "tangled root" also severs the life intertwined with the descriptive narrative of labor, a life that remains invisible by the traditional markers of narrative and the tense of the narrative event. It would be outrageous to claim that Simon Lee himself had become the root or that the labor he engages in is not in itself tasking, yet Wordsworth appears to suggest, within our very *impulse* to sever, an

unrooting taking place we never came to grasp. The final space of the poem becomes then a space of "mourning":

> The tears into his eyes were brought,
> And thanks and praises seemed to run
> So fast out of his heart, I thought
> They never would have done.
> —I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
> With coldness still returning;
> Alas! the gratitude of men
> Hath oftener left me mourning (88-96).

Echoing Simon Lee's enjoyment of the "chase," the mysterious "mourning" of the speaker depends on the reflexive turnings of the poem upon itself, frustrated and enticed by its own impasses. Yet here, it is not the ruptures or the narrative event but the tense that builds around it, one might say the vegetal quality of temporal progression that gives "Simon Lee" its depths. I do not suggest that unrooting is itself about re-settling, or that violent removal can be recuperated by discovering a new place of belonging, but rather that the experience of displacement can disclose a different understanding of *dependency,* of *rooting* not visible as an event. It is not only about being attached to place, but *the aspects of our attachment that we have yet to understand, that* can make an ecological condition of *life* more pronounced and a violent "severing" more inconceivable. Wordsworth's surprising formulation lets us contemplate what constitutes familiar sense of place that may already be defined by "unrooting."

Coda: Feral Links

The lyrical desire to linger with the "I," with an orientation that risks becoming merely pastoral and elemental, becomes a manner of challenging the abstract gaze dominates the question of ecology more broadly, that addresses us more potently precisely because its

constitution *asks us to attend to the "shifts" and sites of non-understanding* within ecological praxis. I want to conclude this chapter with one example drawn from contemporary ecocriticism. Here, the journalist George Monbiot provides an account of reforesting of the Cambrian mountains in Wales.[143] He elaborates a loose biography of Ritchie Tassell, growing up in Northamptonshire where John Clare walked over one hundred years prior. Tassell describes how efforts to replant different trees was itself rendered "unnecessary" by the "birch seeds" that have already "recolonized" land previously burnt or used for grazing, where only tending to the soil and bracken was sufficient to revive growth. The narrative coincides with what Tassell describes as a "real awakening," he concludes:

> Almost every tree we planted has now been overwhelmed by native birch. It grew so densely it looked like the cress you grow on your windowsill. Even when the trees we planted survived, the local birches did much better. They are genetically suited to this site. Seeing the way the birch recolonized was a real awakening. I saw that nature is much better adept at doing these things than we are (74).

The "awakening" Tassel experiences, appears to model a rhetoric of "ecology," yet the peculiarly "recolonizing," of becoming "genetically suited" are infused with the *non-understanding* of its process *(*Monbiot comments: "It was hard to grasp that this land had belonged to the Desert just twenty years before"), a manner of *displacing,* becoming implicated in never fully grasping the vernacular through which ecology speaks that reconstitutes ecological intervention as palpable.[144] The surprising adaptedness of the birch to the area marks a displacement, intruding, albeit gently, into the epistemic vernacular of ecology itself. Reverting

[143] Monbiot, George. Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Rewilding. London: Allen Lane, 2013. Hereafter cited in text.

[144] For more on a basic primer of ecology, see Bonan, Gordon B. *Ecological Climatology: Concepts and Applications*. (2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

to the metaphors of "colonization" and "genetic suitedness," attempt to but do not quite grasp the growth of the Birch.[145]

What I wish to isolate is therefore not so much Monbiot's own broader thesis for reliance upon nature's workings for countering climate change, but the way his journalistic method hinges on testimonies that *crystallize within speech*, the possibility of a vegetal logic that both intrudes into and eludes our attempts to master a place or a culture, one rendered accessible to one another by our *nonunderstanding* about our own ecological practices.[146] Lest it seems that I am championing what Robert Nixon disparages as an "romantic union with organic nature," I want to stress that Tassell's reflections are contingent upon his initial inability to accomplish a "base colonization" when planting trees is already to note the capacity a manner of yielding within that inheres in the lyrical structure, and whose language of "awaken[ing]" addresses a blindness within his embodiment of the "adeptness" of ecological intervention.

As such, my readings of the *Lyrical Ballads* align Wordsworth with a different type of "guilt" and taken up by artists, farmers, and critics alike, a kind rarely discharged through clear-

[145] Conservation efforts in Britain recall Jonathan Bate's recuperative readings that first inaugurate "Romantic Ecology" as a field of study. As the title of his landmark volume *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* readily suggests, Bate seeks to salvage an ecologically responsible Wordsworth, sensitive to the claims of rocks and trees and profoundly attached to the topography of the Lake District. Bate's readings focus a conservationist Wordsworth who is closer in sensibility to Edmund Burke in his emphasis on generational succession and responsibility to futurity. While critical suspicions of Bate's conservative readings are certainly warranted—Bate's willingness to align Wordsworthian ecology by coupling poetry with national tradition risks turning Wordsworth into an ornament for institutional forms of conservation modeled by Britain's *National Trust*—his analysis proves illuminating when he identifies a certain irrepressible mistrust the New Historicist critics express toward Wordsworth's unrepentant trust in nature.

[146] It is worth comparing Tassell's manner of "not knowing" to that of John Clare. But I do want to stress that displacement and not knowing can be, not a recuperative, but a cautiously optimistic experience precisely because we do not always see or understand the violence we perpetuate, what it is we apprehend.

eyed, objective accounts of “things as they are” *but often revives* first-person accounts that netiehr amount to nor contribute significantly to expert discourse. Critics and journalists alike undertake observations touching upon *climate change* whose evidence is everywhere if we choose to look, yet not *because* of our material implication but because of the expression of responsibility, to “grow,” to “reseed,” carries with it older *resonances of elegiac absence and lyric, an“awakening*” to what is not in our hands.

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CHAPTER THREE: MODAL FREEDOMS IN ROUSSEAU'S REVERIES

> "There is, I believe, an age at which an individual might want to stop growing older; you will look for the age at which you wish your species to have gone no further. Discontented with your present state for reasons that herald even greater discontent for your unfortunate posterity, you might perhaps wish to be able to go back in time. And this sentiment must lead to the praise of your first ancestors, the criticism of your contemporaries, and dread for those who will have the misfortune of living after you."[147]
>
> —Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality.*
>
> "I will still be able to enjoy the charm of society; and decrepit, I will live with myself in another age as if I were living with a younger friend."
>
> — Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Reveries of the Solitary Walker.*

Looking No Further

The past two decades have seen a proliferation of attempts, popular and critical, to reinterpret Jean-Jacques Rousseau's political concepts, the "social contract" and the "will of the people" in particular, as points of reference for imagining a planetary movement.[148] The vernacular of Rousseau's political writings on questions of equality and democracy, I imagine, will be very much with us in the coming decades, since it seems that concerns about scarcity of resources and human vulnerability to disaster have exacerbated economic inequality and community displacement. Yet in rereading Rousseau, one cannot help but note that the goal of unilateral mobilization that planetary "action," an insistence that everyone "do their part,"

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[147] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings. Ed. Victor. Gourevitch. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[148] See for instance see popular pieces like Terry Eagleton's "What would Rousseau make of our selfish Age"; "How Rousseau Predicted Trump"; David Lay Williams and Brad Mapes-Martins's "What Rousseau can tell us about the challenges facing the Climate March" for the Washington Post; as well as essays that draw on Rousseau as part of a tradition of European Environmentalism including "Social Contracts in a Changing Climate",

appears somehow antithetical, both in tone and purpose, to Rousseau's consistent defense of independence and freedom and his preference for what comes naturally.[149] Fully acknowledging the irony of reading Rousseau in order to respond to the growing tendency to ventriloquize him for *"climate justice*," this chapter takes up the surprisingly "social" aspect of Rousseau's final work, the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.[150] In turning to the *Reveries,* I want to return to a temporally heterogeneous mode of "longing" that can easily be mistaken as nostalgic, as a wish for what came before the socially determining and an escapist return to the Edenic.

At first glance, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* appears to rehearse certain regressive clichés proper to the ecological sensibility of the "Romantic naturalist": inward-facing, solitary, and given "dreaming" instead of "engaging." In many ways, Rousseau's explicit turn toward what is "natural," what is sufficient for man, or more specifically for Jean-Jacques to exist happily. Flirting with the yearning for an Edenic space untouched by the social imperative to "develop" and "progress," Rousseau looks not to death or what may yet be, but what is already beyond reach, in a condition that he neither asked for nor could return to: his exile in Lake Bienne. In the American tradition, Rachel Carson's ecological parable in *The Silent Spring,* what Greg Garrard, following Laurence Buell, calls the "mythology of betrayed Edens" that pervades twentieth-century ecocriticism. [151] In some ways, we see too clearly the dystopian version of the Edenic refuge in what Robert Nixon calls the "temporal enclaves" of the "eco-archaic," the "Caribbean islands" and the "game reserves" that compose a capitalist simulacrum of the

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[150] All quotations taken from Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778. *Reveries of the Solitary Walker; Botanical Writings; and Letter to Franquieres*. (Dartmouth College published by University Press of New England, 2000).

[151] Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism.* 2nd ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012. 176.

prehistoric. Nixon writes: "In the temporal enclaves of the island refuge ringed by ocean and in the game reserve ringed by electrified fences, the tourist is guaranteed full immersion in the eco-archaic, which is not to be confused with the historical. To enter this refuge is to enter a charmed space that is segregated, among other things, from the history of its own segregation" (Nixon 184). [152] But if such attempts to recreate an Eden sheltered from the vicissitudes of history seeks a fantasy while participating in the movement of capital, its demystification exerts a similarly tenacious grip on the countenance history. Every new day must appear like the one before, and what transpired before *must* address us as daily repetition and therefore the site of an *insatiability*.

Rousseau exemplifies a form of turning inward that seeks to *mark* a limit to the totalizing reach of the social, the figures of "walking" or the practice of botany resonate with Theodor Adorno's mirror of modernity's drive for "productivity" in *Minima Moralia, where* an incessant reaching for the stars begins to resemble an exhaustion of agon.[153] In the *Reveries*, the figure of the "Edenic" its incessant, impossible attempt at actualization sees its utopian reversal in the recurring figure of permanent "exile" through which Rousseau, in his old age, recasts his own life. Rousseau's "solitary walker" asks, what if the Edenic were not the incessant resurrection what had never been, but a flexible, fortunate putting out of reach of modernity's infernal

[152] See also Greg Garrard's comments in *Ecocriticism* on Rousseau and Montaigne as taking Native Americans as a pre-social being—Garrard writes that Rousseau and Montaigne construct an "intra human" difference, a difference that as I argue here, is not ethnic but structural, and an attempt at constructing a tense where the "other" can appear (Garrard 125).

[153] I will return to the comparison to Adorno; here, I note that Jacques Khalip also couples Rousseau and Adorno in detail in his work *Anonymous Life : Romanticism and Dispossession* in his reinterpretation of Romantic life as "impersonal" and "dispossessed." My formulation comes very close to Khalip's "I" that "withdraws from the public sphere." Where Khalip stresses a "scene of self-address," I want to stress a temporal tense of the past conditional that carries an utopian ability to let *nature* emerge and dissipate as an "other."

possibilities? Here is not the fantasy of never having been displaced, but precisely the pleasure of displacements that instead of *marking what is lost,* continuously puts desire itself out of reach, neutralizing a *possibility* that *incessantly haunts quotidian life.* Rousseau undertakes a grammatical project of a "Jean-Jacques" who inhabits purely the space between the *past perfect* and the *past conditional.* That Jean-Jacques himself has been altered *irrevocably* becomes a way of evading modernity's pressure to actualize his social possibilities. Rousseau enables us to glimpse the utopian possibility of no longer adapting to things as they are.

From the outset, the privileged space that Rousseau reserves for the Edenic is easily *mistaken* for or folded into the initiation of a new social project or mere "*amour-propre*," and for this reason, it is so important to mark the points of differentiation. The sentiments expressed in the opening epigraph drawn from the *Second Discourse* can be read as an exemplar of the grammatical mode I am attempting to isolate. At first glance, Rousseau's haunting address about the rapacious development of human society appears an especially prescient, even prophetic account of our ecological anxieties. He speculates that there will be "an age where an individual might want to stop [voudrait s'arrêter] growing older" and would "wish to go back in time [voudrais-tu pouvoir rétrograder]."[154] Yet attending to grammar focuses the peculiar *experience of the present* unfolded through Rousseau's awkward temporal construction. The present conditional "might" points toward an "age" defined by *a desire* that may never be actualized—a transgression defined, not by a compulsion to look back but a *modal* desire that retreats from any actual negation of an event into the triteness of praising the past and lamenting the future.

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[154] See Rousseau Jean-Jacuqes, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*. Ed. Victor. Gourevitch. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Translations checked against *Œuvres Complètes*. Éd. thematique du tricentenaire. Genève: Slatkine, 2012.

Rousseau appears to anticipate the desire to retreat without fully "becoming modern," without having definitively transgressed or gone too far. Here, if the addressee, "you," refers to a "species" not unlike us that beckons our identification, our "want" or "wish" remains bound up, not with the cleverness of knowing our place, but with a belief expressed by a "he" increasingly in the shape of Rousseau speaking about Jean-Jacques.

This configuration points us to a different understanding of the Edenic, one that calls attention to the accessibility, not of a purer, better past but of our sense of the present as closely bound up with a wish from the past. Rousseau does not place us at the "impasse" of an unendurable present but that lingers with a historical negation, where retreat from desire is also to perceive the "age" or "moment" of transgression as itself merely imagined. In what follows, I trace through Rousseau's *Reveries* a grammatical project that reassess the imperative to define the "obligations of the present," an imperative that runs through ecocritical thinking, by lightening the pressure to recognize the present as definitively "post-transgressive." Are there virtues, Rousseau forces us to think, about *granting the past--himself especially--its freedoms?* Emancipating the life of Jean-Jacques means opening up the self-reflexive stance of autobiography, a stance that the reader is invited to think along with rather than morally accept or reject, that resides the past conditional and the past perfect.

As I will demonstrate, Rousseau's formulation is curiously mirrored in Luce Irigaray's conception of vegetal desire as a sexual desire, a desire shared between two: "It is between two, and two humans different *by nature*, that a living sharing can be found again"(Irigaray 208). Irigaray writes at the end of a series of letters on the role of a plants and indeed a "vegetal being" on her own experience:

> Our bloodless sight then decides on being through its appearing and not its hidden existence and growth. Hence the perpetual search for the cause and the origin outside of

> living beings while forgetting their own. Hence, also, the fact that humanity has defined itself in opposition to other species, especially the vegetal and animal species that are more simply related to life, and has underestimated the importance of the difference between the genera for the efflorescence of life, and not only for its reproduction. In order to differentiate itself from other living beings, humanity had then to consider itself to be one and capable of dominating the living world instead of being a living being among others, more capable of sharing with all thanks to its additional awareness and freedom (91).

Irigaray gives a teleological account of the development of the human species where "awareness" became a manner of *closing off* animal and vegetal life as pre-awareness. She laments that temporality definitively negates what come before, a negation that binds thinking to a capacity of domination. What constitutes "sharing," for Irigaray, opening language and desire to others, I contend, reflects for Rousseau a methodological approach to the problem traditionally posed by "*essence,*" the irreducible *difference of* Jean-Jacques himself to an autobiographical impulse. If as Khalip defines it, Romanticism is preoccupied with contemporaneity, the "afterimage, sensuous available yet failing to coincide with those claims that would seek to ripen and reveal it," Rousseau proposes that the form of contemporaneity, of a moment within a moment, can *mystify* something *needing to be held*, by stressing postures that could conceivably move *freely* between past and present without the impulse to be repurposed.

Un-working the Autobiographical

In many ways, the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* presents the culmination of an autobiographical project that consumed Rousseau during the final fifteen years of his life. Living in Paris and beset by persecutions real and imagined, Rousseau began the task self-vindication with a dedication matched only by his interest in botany. Between 1771 and 1776, he was busy at work on a torturous addendum to the *Confessions,* titled *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues.* This period of Rousseau's life is dedicated to doing *justice* to Jean-Jacques to which,

as Rousseau's behavior perhaps attests, autobiography and judgment itself falls short. In February of 1776, in a particularly impassioned state, Rousseau attempted to place a copy of the Dialogues on the high alter in Notre Dame. Upon finding the gates closed, he wandered the streets of Paris, handing out pamphlets titled "To All Frenchmen Who Still Love Justice and Truth" to bewildered passers-by.[155]

It would be easy to cast Rousseau's autobiographical efforts as exemplifying, in the words of Eric Santner, the "manic side of modern melancholy." The melancholic subject is bound to the exhausting libidinal investments of power, but ultimately, glimpses a kind of redemption in the meaninglessness such activities generate (Santner 82).[156] Indeed this episode in particular became emblematic of a feverish, melancholic version of the philosopher that the author W.G. Sebald would describe as longing for "nothing more than to put a halt to the wheels ceaselessly turning in [his] head"(85).[157] The desire for the vindication of Jean-Jacques is, Sebald proposes, that of the weary man who longs "for an end to the eternal business of cogitation," but who "nevertheless keeps on writing up to the end" (86). Yet it is perhaps fitting that this "longing for the end," a posture that readily receives the searing images of the violent inscription of "*power" in the modern age* perfected by writers like *Walter Benjamin* and *W.G. Sebald,* is not Rousseau's last word on what he refers to, in the opening pages of the *Reveries,* his "unique condition."

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[155] For biographical account of the final years of Rousseau's life, see Dent, N. J. H. *Rousseau.* London: Routledge, 2005.

[156] See Santner, Eric L. *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

[157] See Sebald, W. G, and Jo Catling. *A Place in the Country.* First U.S. edition. New York: Random House, 2013. Hereafter cited in text.

In a postscript to his "condition," Rousseau appears to eschew what Andrew Bennett describes as the Romantic act of "writing for posterity," an act that anticipates a literary body "transformed and transliterated, disseminated in the endless act of reading," an image of autobiographical rereading that even in its description, conjures up a sense of gradual exhaustion.[158] Attempting to put Jean-Jacques out of reach of the fickle tastes of posterity, the *Reveries* imagines a "present" constituted by an act, not by being *read* by another, but of a kind of *companionship* with oneself. In the opening of the *Reveries,* Rousseau declares himself "alone on earth, no longer having any brother, neighbor, friend or society other than myself"(*Reveries* 5). The "solitary walker" reinterprets an Adamic condition—the "first" and the "only"—as a mode of coming *after* society, of what happens when in his old age, life has relaxed its hold on *what he must become*. In the titular spirit of Montaigne's *Essais* but writing "only for [him]self," Rousseau describes the *Reveries* as an experiment, where the demand for attention coincides with the mere act of "recording":

> Such a unique situation surely deserves be examined and described, and to this examination I consecrate my last moments of leisure. To do so successfully, it would be necessary to proceed with order and method; but I am incapable of such work, and it would even take me away from my goal, which is to make myself aware of the modifications of my soul and of their sequence. I will perform on myself, to a certain extent, the measurements natural scientists perform on the air in order to know its daily condition. I will apply the barometer to my soul, and these measurements, carefully executed and repeated over a long period of time, may furnish me results as certain as theirs. But I do not extend my enterprise that far. I will be content to keep a record of the measurements without seeking to reduce them to a system (7).

Solitary leisure, for Rousseau, is marked by the "modifications of the soul" that can be "measured" but not "reduce[d]" to a system. As Pierre Saint-Amand puts it, in conducting his "ethereal" experiment, Rousseau enacts a "désoeuvrement" of the task of the philosopher

[158] See Bennett, Andrew. *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity.* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 2.

absorbed by "systems" of nature. [159] Yet Rousseau offers a reinterpretation of secret work of the philosopher: the work of having a system upon which to depend, a system to guard against vulnerabilities of the soul to "others." To be free from social relation, Rousseau concedes, is to become impersonal, to put himself beyond *amour-propre* by recovering a self that cannot be seized as a social image to be repurposed, a self as insubstantial as the conditions of the air. Saint-Amand reads Rousseau's inward turn as a conservative attentiveness to the soul, as moving toward a "personal, interiorized time, without rule or restraint"(248-9). Yet what happens if we did not assume a secular, teleological movement inward, but moved as slow as Rousseau's rhetoric seem to? To measure the soul is to act "like" a natural scientist but without their ambition or their reach ("we need not go so far…"), for it is sufficient for measuring the soul to feel *like* measuring barometric pressure, without the drawback of making the soul corporeal, forcing it to become as substantive as air.

If we take Rousseau at his word— such modifications are not merely formal sequences but an unprecedented "solitariness," the social condition of "the most social man" who "no longer had…[any] society other than [him]self." What would it mean to relate to a self if Jean-Jacques were no longer determined by forced to deploy his self-presentation to gain the "recognition" of others? Here, what first appears to be a mere rhetorical appendage, of being "alone on the earth," takes on a radical significance, of reinterpreting the very *oeuvre* that defined Rousseau's social and biographical course—the Second Discourse. The *Reveries,* presents an attempt to rewrite the *Second Discourse*, not so much "personally," but as achieving a solitariness only faintly contoured as a figure of natural man in his philosophical discourse.

[159] See McDonald, Christie, and Stanley. Hoffmann, eds. *Rousseau and Freedom.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

State of Nature?

Let us briefly return to the narrative experiment that Rousseau undertakes in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,* the attempt to liberate the natural man by freeing him from the constraints of a presentism *where "inequality"* appears and addresses us as *natural*. Without attempting to reproduce the breadth of Rousseau's arguments, I would like to make a few observations about how *teleological thinking becomes a manner of retreating from overdetermined* social relations, a condition that David James puts it, is defined by "dependence on other human beings mediated as a dependence on things." James's point is elucidated by Irigaray, when she observes that Western thought designates "that intersubjectivity is not as good as a relation between subject and object. And that the relation between two subjects is not as good as the relation between one individual and a group of peers. And, further, that a vertical and hierarchical relationship is better than a horizontal relationship"(82).

Beginning with a mechanistic model of the universe, Rousseau remarks that the operations of man are characterized by *"un qualité d'agent de liberté*," a distinction worth retaining less for making any categorical divisions between man and animal and more for the way it locates "liberty" not in subjective determination or the will, but as a "quality of agency," a question of the perception. In this respect, Rousseau begins with a surprisingly sense-based perspective on the human that despite the anti-hedonist valences of his oeuvre as a whole, shares key affinities with Epicurean thought. In particular, Rousseau shares with Lucretius the myth of the fall and the attribution of an external corruption that *perverts natural desire*. As Arthur Lovejoy puts it, Lucretius and Rousseau both isolate man's "strangely factitious desires, his tendency to crave things, not because they themselves gave him pleasure or serve his real needs,

but because under the corrupting influence of social suggestion, they seem to him necessary for gratification of self-esteem."[160] Like Lucretius, Rousseau shares the imaginary of a "naturally occurring state that could be recovered"—yet I would propose that for Rousseau, this sense of recoverable resides not in an essential "state of nature" but in a manner of historical relation that wrests free of a determining teleology that presides over the present.

For instance, in a memorable digression in the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau speculates about the discovery and the reproduction of fire:

> The more one reflects on the subject, the more the distance between pure sensations and the simplest knowledge grows before our eyes, and it is impossible to conceive how man could have crossed such a great divide with nothing but his own strength, without the help of communication, and without being driven by necessity. How many centuries must have passed before man was capable of seeing another fire than that of the heavens? How many different accidents and coincidences were necessary for him to learn the simplest uses of this element? How many times must he have let the fire go out before acquiring the art of reproducing it? And how many times did these secrets perhaps die along with him who had discovered them? (143).

Rousseau ponders the surprisingly variable history enabled by the teleological course of "acquiring the art of fire and reproducing it." Here as in the *Reveries,* Rousseau discovers a degree of latitude in the past perfect and its capacious amenability to revision by merely suspending determinate actualization. At first glance, Rousseau's method appears to unfold through empirical abstraction, separating "sensation[s]" of fire from knowledge of it, asking what the production and reproduction of fire would look like without the presupposition of human "need." Yet without lapsing into a meditation upon the substance of fire*,* Rousseau's rhetoric marks the surprising liberating effects of articulating historical necessity. To imagine a history is not only to imagine a "fire" emptied of "use" but to raise historical questions of how

[160] Lovejoy, Arthur O. "The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality." Modern Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Medieval and Modern Literature, vol. 21, no. 2, 1923, pp. 165-186.

many "accidents" and "coincidences" "*must have*" happened, and the "*necessary*" "forgetting" and "let[ting] go" that over time, may or may not accrue empirical knowledge. Relaxing attachment to the present-tense "use-value" of things alters how man must "*see,"* opening a secular, teleological history to a deep history of "fire" that addresses us primarily as poetic. Echoing the Promethean myth, Rousseau proposes not only that the fire "of the heavens" precedes man's mastery of fire, but that historical thinking requires that man first *sees* the "fire of the heavens," that he *properly becomes historical only by seeing poetically*.

At this point, it is illuminating to think through Rousseau's epistemic method by revisiting Paul de Man's reading of the *Second Discourse* and Rousseau's "Essay on the Origins of Language" in his *Allegories of Reading.*[161] De Man interprets Rousseau's Essay as the "metaphorical illustration" of the "linguistic process of conceptualization"(de Man 154), unfolding a demystification of the empirical origin of language that proposes the *absence of true empirical grounding for social relations*. De Man observes that in Rousseau's narrative relaying the origin of language, the metaphorical cry "giant," uttered by the primitive man in fear, gives the concept of man by positing a legible relation with "other men" through an "illusion of equivalence." He explains: "the word 'man' is the result of a quantitative process of comparison based on measurement, and making deliberate use of the category of number in order to reach a reassuring conclusion: if the other man's height is numerically equal to my own, then he is no longer dangerous." From this, de Man observes that "political praxis," insofar as it deals with differences among men, "implies a transition from qualitative concepts such as needs, passions, man, power, etc., to quantitative concepts involving numbers such as rich, poor, etc"(155).

[161] De Man, Paul. Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.

Implied in de Man's reading of Rousseau is that the pivot from "qualitative" relations of "need" and "passion," to empirical, quantitative relations of "rich and poor," can only diminish the poetically inflected senses of "need," reducing them to quantitative, determinations of "how much is enough?" or "how much would be equal?"

The historical pivot between the qualitative and the quantitative enables us to reevaluate what is "natural" and "necessary" at the sites where its ideological power appears most potent. Rousseau's speculations about agriculture focuses the *anti-social* tendencies of agriculture by eschewing the moralizing progression of teleological history and by addressing "man to man," as if "natural man" *were one of us and not a mere fossilized entity, asking* what it really means to think of something as "necessary":

> "what can we say about agriculture, a craft that demands so much toil and foresight, is so dependent on other skills, which is obviously practicable only where a society has at least begun to exist, and which serves not so much to draw from the earth food it would readily yield, but to compel it to cater to the preferences of our taste?.... Let us suppose that they would have discovered the arts of grinding wheat and fermenting grapes, all of which the gods would have had to teach them, as one cannot conceive their learning these skills on their own. What man in such a condition would be senseless enough to torment himself by cultivating a field that would be plundered by the first man or beast to take a liking to its crop? And how could any man resolve to spend his life engaged in arduous labor, of which the more he needs its rewards the more certain he can be that he will not reap them?"(144).

Rousseau looks to the "craft" of agriculture that "compels" the earth "to cater to the preferences of our taste" instead of "draw[ing] what it readily yields." What matters is not so much the dichotomy between the ethically suspect "compels" and the more benign "draw[s]" but the "uncertain futurity" agriculture conceals in promised returns. Rousseau's use of the conditional, who "would," and who "could," enables us to imagine agriculture not the point of view of someone from whom food is withheld in exchange for labor, but as someone for whom the need to eat is not yet equated with the cycles of rural labor. The prospect of choosing in the dead

ground of the present illuminates how close the supposed fruits of labor come to being no different from what nature "readily yields," where *entering into a* logic of agriculture reveals, beyond the moralizing chimes of working for our daily bread, the possibility of *nature dispossessing you of what you never fully possessed,* of exposure to cycles of privation and the possibility of empty-handedness, of "cultivating a field" and being "plundered." More broadly, the distinction between what is "natural" and the expectations of taste come to focus as dependent less on the *empirical qualities of "*taste" than on "taste" as a moral imperative, inseparable from mastering what we compel, of becoming farmers and artisans. [162]

Just as Rousseau's teleological history becomes a way of withdrawing from teleological commitments*,* his empirical orientation toward "things," becomes insistently anti-presentist. Particularly by re-opening what is historically "conditional," or rather the contractual dimension of social relations*,* Rousseau offers a way of sidestepping the trap of becoming "modern" already laid in the mere act of acquiescing to physical needs, where conceding that man eats already commits him to the material conditions of agricultural *production.* Here, reading Rousseau would appears to reinterpret Ulrich Beck's observation that modernity can be defined by the unmooring of "need" from "natural factors and hence their finiteness and satisfiability."[163] Beck's point is not only that scientific knowledge increasingly determines how humans behave, think, and feel, but that such determinations *feel* oddly "self-referential," no touching upon earthly limitations. Beck delineates a "blind, spontaneous dependence generating process," no longer concerned with needs we perceive to be natural. Yet thinking of *"*need" historically begins not with a longing for definite fulfillment but rather, challenges the perverse logic of

[162] For more on the temporalities of subsistence agriculture, see François, Anne-Lise. "Unstored Energies." The Minnesota Review, vol. 2015, no. 85, 2015, pp. 119-131.

[163] Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: towards a New Modernity.* London: Sage Publications, 1992.56.

using agriculture to determine the condition of "need*"* it supposedly fulfills, letting "natural factors" and "finiteness and satisfiability" traverse the capaciousness of a language shared *with the past* without letting "need" become consumed by the abstract logic of modern production.[164]

Falling into Consciousness

If his *Discourses on the Origin of Inequality* contemplate what it means to yield "need" to a more historically capacious vernacular*,* in the *Reveries,* Rousseau wonders how best to remain faithful to the passions and desire of Jean-Jacques at a younger age, "the movements of the soul" he *felt* so as not to betray them to the needs of the present. In October of 1776, Rousseau took what is by his own admission a fortunate fall, the recovery of which occasioned the composition of the *Reveries*. While returning from a botanizing excursion in Ménilmontant, he was badly hurt when he was knocked down by a Great Dane. Rousseau gives an extensive account of his state of mind prior and after the fall in the "Second Walk." He muses:

> The countryside, still green and cheerful, but partly defoliated and already almost desolate, presented everywhere an image of solitude and of winter's approach. Its appearance gave rise to a mixed impression, sweet and sad, too analogous to my age and lot for me not to make a connection. I saw myself at the decline of an innocent and unfortunate life, my soul still full of vivacious feelings and my mind still bedecked with a few flowers—but flowers already wilted by sadness and dried up by worries. Alone and forsaken, I felt the coming cold of the first frosts and my flagging imagination no longer filled my solitude with beings according to my heart…I went back over the movements of my soul from the time of my youth, through my mature age, since having been sequestered from the society of men, and during the long seclusion in which I must finish my days. I mulled over all the affections of my heart with satisfaction, over so tender but blind attachments, over the less sad than consoling ideas on which my mind had nourished itself for some years; and with a pleasure almost equal to that I had in giving myself up to this musing, I prepared to describe them (Rousseau 9-10).

[164] For what joins Rousseau's concerns with those of Marx, Hegel, Kant, and Fichte. See James, David. *Rousseau and German Idealism: Freedom, Dependence and Necessity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013

The "partly defoliated" countryside offers an "image" and a vernacular for self-expression. The passive gesture of "giving myself up to this musing" appears to echo Marjorie Levinson's rethinking of Ruskin's "pathetic fallacy" as the "human reconceived by its participation in nature" (Levinson 656). Rousseau does not *mistake the winter for a reflection of his own despondency* but discerns in the "impression" of the scenery a change of *mind.* The "desolate" and "defoliated" countryside reflects a mind "bedecked" with "wilted" flowers, the poignant "impression" of the French countryside marks the passage from a more vivid *imagination* into a "flagging" one. Michel Foucault's description of natural history in *The Order of Things* notes that the eighteenth century "posit[s] for the first time a careful gaze on things in and of themselves, and then transcribing them into words that would be smooth, neutralized and faithful. It is understandable that through such a 'purification,' the first form of history to appear was that of nature" (*OT* 142). If natural history depends on a purifying transcription, Rousseau makes space for the interval between past and present residing in "impressions" of change that never become "things in themselves" in descriptions of "nature." Rousseau appears to echo Wordsworth's "emotions recollected in tranquility" when he observes that the "tender but blind attachments" that provide the "nourishment" of "consoling ideas." Tracing a "sequestered" childhood to a "long seclusion in which I must finish my days," Rousseau does not linger over how the conditions of solitude are again forced upon him, but the movements of his "affections," the manner in which "mulling over" the "affections" of the past are elaborated against and become "almost" indistinguishable from the pleasures of *describing them in the present.*

What is remarkable is the potential of invested in this form of lyrical relation when Rousseau describes regaining consciousness after his momentous fall:

> ….The state in which I found myself in that instant [upon waking] is too unusual not to give a description of here.

> Night was coming on. I perceived the sky, some stars, and a little greenery. This first sensation was a delicious moment. I still had no feeling of myself except as being "over there." I was born into life at that instant, and it seemed to me that I filled all the objects I perceived with my frail existence. Entirely absorbed in the present moment, I remembered nothing; I had no distinct notion of my person nor the least idea of what had just happened to me; I knew neither who I was nor where I was; I felt neither injury, fear, nor worry. I watched my blood flow as I would have watched a brook flow, without even suspecting that this blood belonged to me in any way. I felt a rapturous calm in my whole being; and each time I remember it. I felt nothing comparable to it in all the activity of known pleasures (*Reveries* 11).

Rousseau finds himself "absorbed in the present moment" without memory or identity. The recovery of consciousness is accompanied by a sensation of being "born into life at that instant" and "fill[ing] all the objects I perceived with my frail existence."[165] Visiting Rousseau after his fall, his friend Olivier de Corancez was surprised that Rousseau did not conceive of the fall as part of a c*omplot* but as an accident where the Great Dane had genuinely endeavored to avoid him. The ensuing period of recovery gave him peace of mind and the pleasures of a universe where innocuous accidents, free of persecuting agency, can happen. If in Foucault's genealogy, natural observation is the "gaze" of "history," of the gaze *how things happened,* Rousseau opens up *history* to "accidents" and "coincidents." Akin to "natural man" for whom accidents must *have happened,* Rousseau's fall appears to open the present to the peculiar possibility of accidents in a universe where things collude to conspire against Jean-Jacques. Rousseau recalls awaking, seeing the heavens clearly, yet confesses: "I had no distinct notion of my person nor the least idea of what had just happened to me." Unlike accusations that descend upon a Jean-Jacques he does not recognize and must repudiate*,* Rousseau becomes free to reconstitute his "frail existence" *in* "the objects…perceived." The impact of the fall is inscribed not in an

[165] There are clear parallels between Rousseau's account of "filling the objects" and the "oceanic feeling" Freud describes in *Civilization and its Discontents.* For a more extensive discussions of the parallels see: Marie Hélène Huet, "On the Negative Uses of Freedom." *Rousseau and Freedom.* 257

ontological transfer of the soul to "objects" but the liberating stance of not knowing "what happened to [him]" and therefore not becoming himself, a negation anchored in a surprising simile: "I watched my blood flow as I would have watched a brook." The self is not given in the figure of a brook but rather, in the displacement of a gaze, from past-tense "watched" to the past perfect of "would have watched." Looking toward the "sky," the "stars," and the "greenery" is not, here, a kind of self-positioning but *a manner of becoming the "present" by moving from the past to the past conditional,* of lightening the social pressure of having become a body that must be recognized or looked after and finding in the historical interval a negative "freedom" from incessant becoming and a surprisingly "neutral" relation to himself.

Rousseau's point comes further into focus, I think, by contrasting his simple rhetorical constructions to contemporary attempts by philosophers of science and anthropologists to make sense of how we engage with nature by securing "events" against the vulnerabilities of description. As I began to propose in the introduction, ecocriticism is absorbed by narratives of *becoming,* and writers like *Quentin Meillassoux*, Edourdo Kohn, and Timothy Morton draw on different traditions, philosophical, sociolinguistic, and literary respectively to both secure both *the purity of the "ecological" from "seeing" and "describing."* Rousseau's particular scan on *solitariness,* I contend, trains us to attend to change, to the way *history demystifies* and emancipates us *from the determinate seeking of something that unconditionally was* and that determines what *must be.*

For Meillassoux, the fossil datum carries traces of an ancestral past, consisting of "matter independent of humanity" – "the ancestral does not designate an ancient event – it designates an event anterior to terrestrial life and hence anterior to givenness itself. Though ancestrality is a temporal notion, its definition does not invoke distance in time, but rather anteriority in time.

This is why the arche-fossil does not merely refer to an un-witnessed occurrence, but to a non-given occurrence – ancestral reality does not refer to occurrences which a lacunary givenness cannot apprehend, but to occurrences which are not contemporaneous with any givenness, whether lacunary or not"(Meillassoux 20). As Elizabeth Povinelli and many others have pointed out, Meillassoux's argument depends on certain presuppositions about mysterious substance of the fossil as somehow pre-dated*, as* bracketed off from its availability to *us*—a view that limits any claim the fossil archive may have to constructing knowledge in the present. I would only add that the very contortions of his rhetoric betray him in a different way; folding the temporality of the fossil into the ad-hoc negation of the "non-given" only points to the giveness of this awkward designation. Ironically, the repetition of the term "non-given" cannot but become a symptom of Meillassoux's wish for an "event" that could be invulnerable to memory and description. This wish *is contemporaneity at its most exemplary,* a desire for invulnerability would guard against the utter exposure—of both observer and the natural-historical past—to figural transformation.

In his book *How Forests Think,* Eduardo Kohn offers an anthropological reconceptualization of Charles Pierce's attempt to expand linguistic signification beyond its human focus. I certainly think this is a worthy project, but Kohn's central examples hover on the cusp of *the poetic, only to collapse again into empirical self-positioning.* For instance, he describes sitting in a bus on a road beset by landslides and observing that the mountains above him were beginning to fall.[166] Kohn recalls the disconnect between his panic, the calmness of the driver, and the indifference of tourists who were chatting, laughing, and purchasing refreshments. Kohn observes:

[166] Kohn, Eduardo. *How Forests Think: toward an Anthropology beyond the Human.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

> The incongruity between the tourists' nonchalance and my sense of danger provoked in me a strange feeling. As my constant what-ifs became increasingly distant from the carefree chattering tourists, what at first began as a diffuse sense of unease soon morphed into a sense of profound alienation.
> ….This discrepancy between my perception of the world and that of those around me sundered me from the world and those living in it. All I was left with were my own thoughts of future dangers spinning themselves out of control.
> …. Within a few minutes I spotted a tanager feeding in the shrubs at the scruffy edges of town where molding cinder blocks meet polished river cobbles. I had brought along my binoculars and managed, after some searching, to locate the bird. I rolled the focusing knob and the moment that bird's thick black beak became sharp I experienced a sudden shift. My sense of separation simply dissolved. And, like the tanager coming into focus, I snapped back into the world of life (Kohn 61-2).

Kohn traces the "radical doubt" he experiences to a break between rational thought and the surrounding world:

> But symbolic thought run wild can make us experience "ourselves" as set apart from everything: our social contexts, the environments in which we live, and ultimately even our desires and dreams. We become displaced to such an extent that we come to question the indexical ties that would otherwise ground this special kind of symbolic thinking in "our" bodies, bodies that are themselves indexically grounded in the worlds beyond them: *I think therefore I doubt that I am* (62).

Kohn's insights are strikingly different from those of Rousseau. While Kohn focuses on the paralyzing anxiety of separation, the sense of a "subject" trapped within himself, what he actually isolates is the very real "future dangers spinning themselves out of control." The problem is not, as Kohn insists, thinking "displaced" him from the "living present," necessarily leading to an unbearable anxiety of groundlessness. This displacement reflects upon an already displaced relation witnessed by the incomprehensible "chatter" of the tourists and their alien, and the "environment" they do not know, here are the first stirrings of an awareness that lingers with radical historical differences, differences that *cannot be merely* eliminated by appealing to "social context." Yet Kohn *is anxious that such a relation is "less indexically grounded"* and becomes reassured when he sees the tanager through the that he is, indeed human, repositioned in the role of making his empirical observations.

Finally, before returning to the *Reveries,* I would like to reinterpret the manner in which Rousseau's "solitary walker" appears to be an instance of the Hegelian "beautiful soul," a resemblance that I think, challenges the place and purpose of the "beautiful soul" in both Hegel's historical paradigm and in Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature.* Hegel writes of the "beautiful soul" that "it is so complete in its world and life that it may attempt to cut itself off from the concrete substance of actual society which alone makes possible the existence of conscience. It then tries to cultivate goodness in solitary isolation from the actual social whole…. It has the self-confidence and individual inspiration of Conscience, but frankly rejects the concrete objectivity which secures for Conscience liberation from mere subjectivity."[167] Hegel here, appears to reproduce the very contours of Rousseau's life, or at least, the ones Rousseau gives himself*: a* movement from isolation to solitariness that eschews "concrete objectivity" at every turn. Yet Rousseau does not "reject" what is concrete *per se*—in fact, as we have seen, things never become concrete*,* but are generally spared by the turnings of recollection. Here, a dilemma emerges, does Hegel chide "beautiful soul" for neglecting the "social whole" or does the beautiful soul call into question the very existence of a "social whole," demystifying a concept made real only in the *coercive recognitions* it extracts? [168]

In *Ecology without Nature,* Morton translates the structural elements of Hegel's critique into an ecological ethic. Morton defines the beautiful soul as one who "washes his or her hands of the corrupt world, refusing to admit how in this very abstemiousness and distaste he or she participates in the creation of that world. The world-weary soul holds all beliefs and ideas at a

[167] Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, Arnold V Miller, and J. N Findlay. *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

[168] See also Rei Terada's *Looking Away* and "Looking at the Stars Forever" for accounts of the totalizing tendencies of Hegelian thought and the "plae" of Romanticism in relation to them.

distance. The only ethical option is to muck in" (Morton 13). The "beautiful soul" is the existential subject poised between the "choices" of identification with the polluted world or distance from the polluted world. Yet what is preserved in either choice *is the giveness of the polluted world and the overdetermined history of the social that lead "us" here.* Needless to say, this narrative reserves no place for people at the edges of what we define as "modernity" but are incessantly impacted by climate change. Morton's suggestion that current catastrophe is "meaningless" but that we should "accept responsibility" whether or not we are responsible cleaves the world along the lines of "being" and "nothingness"—the world *is* polluted or it is nothing. Yet for Rousseau, meaning never takes shape in the temporality of either/or, in the whole world having amounted to something or nothing. What matters is the manner in which the past appears provisionally accessible but flexible in it*s availability*, its diversions into what "would have been the case," or what one "would have" done.

"*Perhaps I, too, have changed"*

Surprisingly, for all about the unchanging, romantic nature, Rousseau devotes much of the *Reveries* to contemplating a "nature" that has been altered and made different. Confident about his benevolent nature but reflecting on the years of dwelling upon social persecution, Rousseau speculates whether it is possible that his *nature has* changed:

> …perhaps, without knowing it, I, too have changed more than necessary. What natural temperament could resist a situation similar to mine without being altered? Convinced by twenty years of experience that everything in the way of happy dispositions which nature has put in my heart has been turned to the prejudice of myself or of others by my fate and by those who dispose of it, I can no longer consider a good action which they offer me to do as anything but a snare tendered me under which some evil is hidden."(Rousseau 53).

Rousseau admits that change can happen "without knowing it," but without surrendering the soul

to the mere physical effects of time, he defers to the elusive perception of what is "necessary." Instead of describing his temperament as one resistant or adaptive to a situation, Rousseau wonders what it means for any temperament to "resist a situation like mine," again, deferring concreteness in favor of a set of mutable *present conditions.* Rousseau gestures to the real plots of Diderot and Grimm and the imagined betrayals attributed to Hume, elaborated in a series of extraordinary accusations in the *Confessions* and his *Letters to M. de St-Germain,* but refrains from explicitly addressing them. Orienting everything around the epistemic reach of the present, Rousseau achieves the fine balance of surrendering the specificities of his "fate" to others and having the last laugh by retaining hold on how he sees it. Like chemical deposits, his "happy dispositions" were "placed in my heart" and "turned into prejudice." Yet in this willingness to release both his temperament and fate as what were never properly his to dispose of, Rousseau retains an epistemic freedom vis-à-vis his past innocence and his present conduct. By limiting his present capacities "I can no longer…without," he leaves open the lucky possibility paranoia introduces, that he can and may indeed have been spared the "snares" without really knowing it.

Although the self-consciously paranoid mind is prone to fortunate accidents and lucky breaks, the difficulty of separating well-intended "action" from the "snare," Rousseau readily admits, renders him "ineffectual." He laments:

> Even so, I have often sensed that those whom I benefited became friendly toward me through gratitude even more than through self-interest. But in this respect, as in all others, things completely changed countenance as soon as my misfortunes began. From that time, on I have lived among a new generation that does not resemble the former at all, and with the change in the feelings of others toward me came a change in feelings toward them. The same people I saw in each of these two vastly different generations have, so to speak, adapted themselves to each one in succession (54).

Rather ingeniously, Rousseau divides "generations" not in 12-year allotments but a clear perception of before and after, marked by "gratitude" and treachery. Such a "generational"

transition enables Rousseau to "liv[e] among," not traitors *per se,* but changes "in feeling" and people who have "adapted themselves," perceptions that wrought within himself similarly irreversible "change in feeling," anchored, not in the actual but the perceived "feelings" of others. Without knowing or committing definitively to what the other thinks or feels, Rousseau nevertheless remains acutely sensitive to others, renewing the past benevolence of others without resetting the "snares" of social manners that would entice him into thinking their kindnesses persist into the present. Conversely, the "present" becomes less an irrevocable social condition than a displacement of his attitude brought on by *perceived changes* in others.

Given the perturbations he seems to cause others and himself, Rousseau wonders whether if it would have been better if he were able to remain "invisible." Here, Rousseau reinterprets the question of whether an empirical understanding of one's becoming as invisible, immune to social interaction, and objectively what is rationally good, is possible at all. Drawing from the story of Gyges in Plato's *Republic,* Rousseau speculates, playfully:

> If I had remained free, obscure, and isolated as I was made to be, I would have done only good; for I do not have the seed of any harmful passion in my heart. If I had been invisible and all-powerful like God, I would have been beneficent and good like Him…. Perhaps in moments of lightheartedness, I would have been childish enough to perform an occasional prodigy but, perfectly disinterested with respect to myself and having only my natural inclinations as law, for a few acts of severe justice I would have performed a thousand merciful and equitable ones (55).

Rousseau imagines putting on the ring of Gyges, acting in a way that ceases to *inflect* the person of "Rousseau." Departing from the myth recounted by Socrates, Rousseau depicts invisibility less as a fantasy of frictionless usurpation than a yearning for self-effacement in the workings of his proper nature—"I will have only my natural inclinations as law." Inhabiting an "invisible" agency reflects the limits of effacement, and perhaps of Rousseau's initial proposal to become "like" the natural scientist, to be completely *neutral*. As soon as he proposes this initial

experiment, Rousseau begins to defend his hypothetical iniquities. Speculating about the lightness of an "occasional prodigy" or the childish balancing of mercy and severe justice, the character of Jean-Jacques creeps back into the necessities of nature in the figure of the prankster. Rousseau eventually concedes: "To flatter myself that these advantages would not have seduced me or that reason would have stopped me from this fatal bent would be to understand nature and myself quite poorly" (55-6). In the fantasy of invisibility, the past conditional, what "would not have" or what "what have," accrues with a repetitive urgency. Gentle attempts to redeem his nature gives way to a modal history. "Perhaps in moments of lightheartedness" is a temporal interruption that joins the present of reading and its iteration in the past conditional releasing provisionally *the hold of social repercussions on the past.* The past becomes less a set of determining conditions that corrupted a nature forever*,* than the achievement of the "necessity" of the present finally realized, not by accepting final judgments about what Rousseau did or did not do, but in giving in to the persistence of what Jean-Jacques himself "would" and "would not."

The Fifth Walk

Thus far, I have attempted to demonstrate that, Rousseau's *desoeuvrement of Rousseau the philosopher grants Rousseau himself a certain freedom,* the very social terms *actualized in the* disavowals of autobiography. But let us look at what happens when the past perfect, "I would have been," coincides too closely with a *present tense* wish, when thinness of contact between a wish to remain and a wish to return becomes an *intense preoccupation*. "The Fifth Walk" demonstrates the convergence of an Edenic release of the past and perpetual exile. Perhaps in a manner that reinterprets the desire for historically pure "enclaves" that simulate or attempt to concretize on the level of the material *a release* from the pressures of development available to

anyone and everyone, Rousseau *presses upon the* thin point of contact when the description of *having been* exerts *too strongly* a claim over the wish "to have gone no further," where recollection reflects upon the infinite capacities *of a wish to be broken down into singular moments.*

Rousseau briefly lived on the Island of Saint Peter on Lake Bienne after the stoning of his house at Môtiers. Briefly granted refuge after their traumatic ordeal, Rousseau and Thérèse occupied a small house with few luxuries. As elsewhere in the *Reveries,* Rousseau disguises the steady stream of visitors he received, implying in his descriptions that he and Thérèse had only the company of the tax collector and his wife. The autobiographical elisions in Rousseau's account emphasizes the archetypal significance of the solitary island as a figure of both exile and an Edenic freedom, as a thin layer joining the "isolation" of childhood and the perpetual *exile of the present*. Recalling the peace he discovered in his miniature paradise in 1765, Rousseau observes: "I wanted them to make this refuge a perpetual prison for me, to confine me to it for life"(42). The convergence of "refuge" and "perpetual" confinement expresses an intense wish for the very conditions the wish itself destroys, a rare instance mirrored in the composite formation of the island itself:

> The beautiful basin almost circular in form has two small Islands in its center, one inhabited and cultivated, almost half a league around; the other smaller, uninhabited, and uncultivated, and which will ultimately be destroyed because earth is constantly taken from it to repair the destruction waves and storms make to the larger one. Thus it is that the substance of the weak is always used for the advantage of the powerful (42).[169]

As if it were a figure for the *desires* of Jean-Jacques, the "basin" circumscribes the island and shelters it from external interference, but the island is itself exposed to the passage of time in the

[169] Special thanks to my FWS students in Spring 2016 for their astute discussions on the significance of this passage.

form of continuous attrition. The larger island can only be repaired the cannibalization of the "uninhabited" and "uncultivated" by the "inhabited" and "cultivated," of the what *yet might never be* by what has been. The natural finitude of both islands sketches a process of "destruction" taking place within a sheltered eternity.

In such a limited setting, Rousseau cultivates his passion for botany. Having begun describing the plants on the island, hemuses: "It is said that a German did a book about a lemon peel; I would have done one about each type of hay of the meadows, each moss of the woods, each lichen that carpets the rocks; in short, I did not want to leave a blade of grass or a plant particle which was not amply described"(43). The past conditional "I would have done" mirrors the time of destruction with a utopian time of infinite progression and accumulation promised by natural description. Rousseau could describe "each blade of grass" and each "plant particle." Dividing the island into "small squares" and setting out on excursions with his *System Naturae,* the island botanist appears as a fitting emblem for the *Reveries as a whole (*a work preparing to be eclipsed by *botany*) by flirting with a system without *realizing* its parameters, immersing himself in the temporal sequence of observing: "nothing is more singular than the raptures and ecstasies I felt with each observation I made on plant structure and organization"(43-4). Here, Rousseau offers a response to the rationalist fulfillment and that instrumentalizes and dominates the mind. He knows that the project is never taken up in earnest with the purpose of completion, yet the promise of eternity appears to be briefly, successively embodied in every "observation."

W.G. Sebald observes in his essay on Rousseau that: "The central motif of this passage is not so much the impartial insight into the indigenous plants of the island as that of ordering, classification, and the creation of a perfect system. Thus this apparently innocent occupation—the deliberate resolve no longer to think and merely to look at nature—becomes, for the writer

plagued by the chronic need to think and work, a demanding rationalistic project involving the compiling of lists, indices, and catalogs, along with the precise description of, for example, the long stamens of self-heal, the springiness of those of nettle and of wall-pellitory, and the sudden bursting of the seed capsules of balsam and of beech"(Sebald 88). Certainly, Rousseau exaggerates the raptures of listing plants and their anatomical particularities, but here, he accentuates the punctured, performative ecstasy expressed in every description, its "singular" joy. The melancholic who seeks only to escape from the need to "think and work," is a far cry the "ecstasies" of Rousseau emphatically marks. In his instructions to Madame Delessert, Rousseau remarks it is crucial that her children not only learn the complex nomenclature of botanical studies but to identify the plants in the field: "People pretend that botany is but a science of words which exercises only the memory and teaches one only to name plants. For me, I do not know any science which is merely a science of words…If we give your children only an amusing occupation, we miss the best half of our aim which is, in amusing them, to exercise their intelligence and accustom them to paying attention. Before teaching them to learn to name what they see, let us begin by teaching them to see it"(Rousseau 144). Botany, in short, is *poetic*—it concerns not only Linnaean taxonomy but "exercises" of the intellect and "paying attention," a *seeing* that is prior to naming and that as we know from de Man, acquires resonances of a "passionate" relation folded into a "quantitative" one. Gathering and observing plants comes close to monitor the "sequence" and "modification" of the soul, stripping a "demanding rationalistic project" from its presupposed realization of its own internal logic by asserting the specific, pleasurable attentiveness of the observer, renewed with every new botanical part. The patient sequence of name after name and the infinite horizon promised by nature endure, not in a universal system, but only insofar as the amount of plant-life exceeds the task of one man to list

them. This infiniteness joins provisionally with the excitement of a present-tense, personal and limited rediscovery when Rousseau "rereads" his own experiences. Here, the blinding "ecstasy"—becomes a kind of *amor fati,* a desire to receive again a prior desire, what he "would have done" for eternity and the "raptures" he "had felt."

The "Fifth Walk" cannot quite sustain the balance of perpetual botanical variety and its ecstatic discovery. Such a course is prone to exhaustion, and although it harmonizes the workings of the psyche by joining both Rousseau and Jean-Jacques in its rhythms of ecstasy, its reach is decidedly finite. The prospect of a more sustainable *union* with Jean-Jacques breaks down near the end of the "Fifth Walk," when Rousseau loses himself in the movements of the waves:

> The ebb and flow of this water and its noise, continual but magnified at intervals, striking my ears and eyes without respite, took the place of the internal movements which reverie extinguished within me and was enough to make me feel my existence with pleasure and without taking the trouble to think. From time to time some weak and short reflection about the instability of things in this world arose, an image brought on by the surface of the water. But soon these weak impressions were erased by the uniformity of the continual movement which lulled me and which, without any active assistance from my soul, held me so fast that, called by the hour and the agreed upon signal, I could not tear myself away without effort (Rousseau 45).

The abstractions of *ebb and flow* eventually loosen the hold of sequence, bringing to nondifferentiation the temporal meeting point of the past conditional and the present. In the mesmerizing trance, Rousseau finds the "reverie extinguished" within himself. Jean Starobinski writes: "Neither mental activity nor the world's presence is abolished, however, although both are drastically curtained. Jean-Jacques draws his sense of existence from this double attenuation which is almost a double annihilation, except that it stops on the brink of silence and nothingness. What remains visible of things and the self is not their secret, profound essence but their surface—with its innocent, precarious tranquility." Starobinski notes that Rousseau brings

the "world's presence" and "mental activity" to the brink of touching only to find a still, precarious tranquility in writing itself.[170] Yet Starobinski's account subordinates "living with," to the formal scene of world and self while what Rousseau feels to be extinguished *is* the social intimacy that guides the *Reveries*—"I will still be able to enjoy the charm of society; and decrepit, I will live with myself in another age as if I were living with a younger friend"(Rousseau 7). Jacques Khalip writes that Rousseau's subject "cannot properly return to a positional self as the source for those transformations since they have already relocated subjectivity to even further points in time. For Rousseau, figurality avows and simultaneously renounces referentiality because what reference *is* precisely the question that the waves endlessly rock and transport"(72).[171] Khalip observes that the dimming of recollected perception to "continual movement" of the waves annuls the very "person" that anchors Rousseau's recollection. I do not disagree with Khalip *per se*, yet the "ebb and flow of the water…held [him] so fast" even as it unmoors subjectivity from any anchoring, becomes a figure of "weak and short reflection." I would only contend that *reference* become *liquid* is not merely the obliteration of a "positional" self, recoverable in the past, but a figure for the methodology of the *Reveries itself,* not Jean-Jacques as he is *perceived,* but as he "would have wished" that becomes a site of annihilation if the *wish itself is extinguished.*

By reflecting *upon* the waves, a figure for continuous displacement itself, Rousseau comes to reflect on this unmooring as the core of an *earthly* condition. Reprising the Adamic in earnest, this reflection substitutes meditations upon the existential conditions of the earth for his

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[170] Starobinski, Jean. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Transparency and Obstruction. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

[171] Khalip, Jacques. *Anonymous Life : Romanticism and Dispossession.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009. Hereafter cited in text.

internal movements that traverse between the present and the past conditional, bringing to extinction the claims of Jean-Jacques:

> Everything is in continual flux on earth. Nothing on it retains constant and static form, and our affections, which are attached to external things, necessarily pass away and change as they do. Always ahead of or behind us, they recall the past which is no longer or foretell the future which often is in no way to be: there is nothing solid there to which the heart might attach itself"(46).

The condition of being "on earth" takes on a quality of "flux" without "constant and static form." Earthly condition becomes an emblem for the experiences that traverse Rousseau's writings thus far, a "past which is no longer" and a "future which often is in no way to be." Despite the despondency that the "flux" of time conjures, the passage is a lucid observation about the "nature of things" that neither resurrects the sting of past persecutions nor a future where the pain of exile may be reversed. The nature of "things" designates instead the *flexibility* and *specificity* nature preserves, a movement between what "is no longer" and "is in no way to be" without ever coming to reside in the empirical qualities of things.

In a manner that resonates with the t, attachments to "external things," be they reefs or islands or flowers, signify less a shared condition of survival on earth than the *inisistently temporal condition of* "sharing" a present—of traversing constantly what would have been and what may never be—and *conversely,* nature's inaccessibility as things that are merely present. Rousseau's desire "If I could only go end my days on this beloved island!" is tempered by resigning himself to the vivid piquancy of his present impressions, and the knowledge that the Jean-Jacques who lived on the island has passed away within this very desire:

> In my ecstasies, their objects often eluded my senses. Now the deeper my reverie is, the more intensely it depicts them to me. I am often more in the midst of them and even more pleasantly so than when I was really there. The misfortune is that to the extent that my imagination cools this comes with more labor and does not last long. Alas! It is when we begin to leave our skin that it hinders [obfusquer] us the most (48).

Such acknowledgements of impending mortality also offer a sobering of the difference between the "ecstasies" that "elude" things and the peculiar *look of things* without them. The "deeper" and "more intense" the depiction of the objects, the more they seem a kind of simulacra, "more pleasantly so than when I was really there," an observation made familiar in postmodern critique where consumer goods, even as they attempt to conjure up "experience," often have sheen of something unreal, indicative of their reified temporalities. The intensity it requires to *realize an object* only drains the "ecstasy" of moving between past and present, reminding Rousseau that the "imagination cools" and demands "more" mental labor than he can offer. The "skin," a figure for surface that displaces the surface of the lake, "hinders," him (here *obfusquer* resonates with opacity) from realizing the intensity of the imagination and the past it seeks to secure, resigning him to a banal but real attrition of the body that is irredeemable by transfiguration.

If Rousseau's hollowing out of his "earthly" condition risks passing as an unremarkable stoicism, it is worth noting that even in despair Rousseau rediscovers something like a fortunate safeguard from the "demands of rationality" in the mere fact of exhaustion and limits. The pressure and burning need to actualize an "object" ready for seizure exerts a demand upon his mental capacities that luckily, old age enables him to refuse. By contrast, along the natural surfaces of Lake Bienne, the infinite numbers of plants divisible into even smaller particles is a reverie that not only holds at bay an irredeemable past, but one that plays out the fantasy of infinite availability and rapturous accessibility that only *becomes present by never actualizing,* by *having already been circumscribed by the desires of the past.* Here then, is a provisional natural-historical rhetoric that appears radical for its flexibility and for how much it concedes as *inaccessible*. In the final "dimming" of the imagination, the intensity of the objects soberly admits limitations to the joy of experience conditioned by an object that lasts indefinitely: "there

is hardly an instant when the heart can genuinely say to us: *I would like this instant to last forever.* And how can we call happiness a fleeting state which leaves our heart still worried and empty, which makes us long for something beforehand or desire something else afterward?"(46). Forever can only be an *enclosure* contingent upon what, like Rousseau's catalog of plants, *never comes to be seized.* Human happiness can be "intensely" held in "earthly impressions" *precisely because* objects reveal nothing "solid" to hold on to, yet without applying the requisite pressure to seize an object, *this* vanitas need never be disclosed.

Here, the "Fifth Walk" *not only demystifies the simulacra*—the enclaves of pastoral exemption from history or pre-humanness—but offers a substitution in the noncompletion *inherent in projects of rationality.* simulacra of commodified, frozen nature and what it promises. Instead of resource and labor-intensive and often bizarrely unsatisfying "enclaves" of natural experience, Rousseau offers the utopian reversal of an Eden that is renewable and provisionally infinite precisely because natural description makes itself available to a desire never quite fulfilled in the past and to which one yields the present of writing. Having left its confines, the present is free to enjoy its infiniteness, being no longer beholden to the possibility or desirability of a realizable project. Rousseau *demystifies* the surface of concretization, the surface that holds our attention by seizing the imagination and *forcing it to actualize the logic of a thing.* For Rousseau, the intensity of the imagination *will cool*—even with its promise of infinite ecstasy—as soon as it insists upon natural "objects" available to present tense desire, returning to the nagging obstruction of "skin," to the affections that have become *real only* by passing away.

Drifting Reconsidered

Rousseau's dimming imagination touches upon Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted fragment "*Sur L'eau."* Adorno hopes that within the sameness of development, mankind will experience an exhaustion of progress:

> "The conception of unfettered activity, of uninterrupted procreation, of chubby insatiability, of freedom as frantic bustle, feeds on the bourgeois concept of nature that has always served solely to proclaim social violence as unchangeable, as a piece of healthy eternity…. If uninhibited people are by no means the most agreeable or even the freest, a society rid of its fetters might take thought that even the forces of production are not the deepest substratum of man, but represent his historical form adapted to the production of commodities. Perhaps the true society will grow tired of development and, out of freedom, leave possibilities unused, instead of storming under a confused compulsion to the conquest of strange stars. A mankind which no longer knows want will begin to have an inkling of the delusory, futile nature of all the arrangements… Enjoyment itself would be affected, just as its present framework is inseparable from operating, planning, having one's way, subjugating. Rien faire comme une bête, lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky, 'being, nothing else, without any further definition and fulfillment', might take the place of process, act, satisfaction, and so truly keep the promise of dialectical logic that it would culminate in its origin.[172]

As decades of commentary on the Frankfurt School proposes, to be "freed from need" and to "no longer know want" does not guarantee that no one will go hungry but begins *with the inevitibiltiy of* satiation, the surfaces of pleasure that negate the logic of "want" that shapes twentieth-century communist praxis.[173] More broadly, Adorno imagines loosening life from the logic of the commodity itself, of "operating, planning, and subjugating" in the present tense. Yet Adorno nevertheless *begins with the subject already absorbed by the commodity form and whose "freedom" continues to lie ahead in exhaustion.* If anything, Rousseau renders this prophetic playing out of rationalization unnecessary. *The future-tense of man who "will by their freedom,*

[172] Adorno, Theodor W., and E. F. N Jephcott. Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life. London: Verso, 2005.
[173] See Robert Kaufmann's essay: "What Is Construction, What's the Aesthetic, What Was Adorno Doing?"

leave possibilities unused," already resides in the image of "natural man" and by extension, Jean-Jacques that resides at the heart of a certain inheritance of enlightenment. The voluptuous "drifting" that surprises rationalization discovers a provisional figure in Rousseau's lakeside dreamer who loosens the hold of rationalization by temporalizing it, enacting and renewing the pleasures of what would have been done into the *descriptions of the present* of recollection, asserting, instead of a historical project of systematization, one of non-fulfillment that both releases the past from its rationalizing *agon* and the present from determination by the past. The danger, as Rousseau attests, persists that the pleasures of non-fulfillment in the past will *become a desire to seize in the present,* one that auspiciously, the very limitations of the imagination forecloses.[174]

Often read alongside the *Reveries,* a famous passage on idleness from Rousseau's *Confessions* offers an alternative scan on "drifting" that read alongside Adorno, evacuates the horizon of historical prophecy that *requires things eventually to be exhausted* by refuting the extent to which activities are ever *as rationalized as we presuppose*:

> The idleness I love is not that of a do-nothing who stays there with his arms crossed in total inactivity and thinks no more than he acts. It is both that of a child who is ceaselessly in motion while doing nothing and, at the same time, that of a dotard who strays when his arms are at rest. I love to occupy myself by doing trifles, beginning a hundred things and finishing none of them, going and coming as the fancy comes into my

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[174] See here the special issue on "Emergent Precarities and Lateral Aesthetics: An Introduction" edited by Elizabeth Adan and Benjamin Bateman: "Rancière locates the emancipatory politics of the aesthetic regime in this very condition or quality of indeterminacy. Specifically, formulated in, through, and around such indeterminacy, sensation and perception drift from their otherwise preconceived meanings and effects and emerge unfettered by familiar, canonical, or otherwise dominant suppositions creating instead, as Rancière puts it, "scenes of dissensus" (48–49).16 While catching the drift of this emancipatory indeterminacy may take shape in similarly unpredictable, diffuse, and indirect ways and the humanities around a frail, inconsistent, and opaque human, one whose capacities for making sense are compromised in part because of an emerging alter-sense that the human is interwoven with precarious nonhuman agencies (e.g., oceans and ice caps), is an ethical project, to be sure, but it is also an aesthetic project demanding imagination, insight, and ingenuity."

> head, changing plans at each instant, following a fly in all its flying about, wanting to uproot a rock to see what is under it, undertaking a labor of ten years with ardor, and abandoning it without regret after ten minutes, in sum, musing all day long without order and without sequence, and following only the caprice of the moment in everything (637).[175]

Rousseau's idleness takes the shape of the "child" or the "dotard," figures who are generally excluded from being useful, evading the need to invoke an opposition between industriousness and idleness. Instead, their activities appear to drift from any fixed mode of activity. To be "ceaselessly in motion while doing nothing" and to "stray" when "his arms are at rest" gesture to the liberating "nature" within doing anything. Without *classifying such ceaselessness* as a subversiveness to be harnessed, Rousseau delights in the way this figure accumulate points of mimicry in his own life, the habits of following every "fancy" or embracing "the caprice of the moment." Freedom need not reproduce the perverse antics of Adorno's "uninhibited individual," rather, these resemblances become clever points of retreat from the confessional genre where life takes moral shape as industrious or idle. What is childlike or absent-minded opens up interstices of freedom in what appears full of intent. The negation, "abandoning without regret within ten minutes," applied to "a labor of ten years," does not necessarily foreclose a future where tasks are accomplished and houses are built but offers the form of "freedom," of "undertaking…with ardor" and "abandoning without regret"—what natural man would have done when faced with an agricultural contract—as an alternative to the binding of the self to labor, its "order and sequence."

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Utopian Praxis

If in the "Fifth Walk," botany intrudes into the more painful meditations of the past, the Adamic arc of the *Reveries* comes to the fore in the "Seventh Walk." In the pages that preceded, I have attempted to isolate a mode of relating to the past through the temporality of the past conditional that a logic actualized in the *present*. Through this *flirtation with system that never commits,* Rousseau attempts to salvage a provisional figure of freedom by subverting the logic of Enlightenment history and the arrangements of biography he found himself instrumental in shaping. Here, the *Reveries* seems to enact the desoeuvrement of even this endeavor lest it become, again, an attempt to vindicate himself that robs him of his freedom. In the opening passage of the "Seventh Walk," Rousseau confesses that having just begun his "collection" of "dreams," he is already giving way to the present-tense pleasures of botany: "Another pastime takes its place, absorbs me, and even deprives me of the time to dream. I give myself up to it with an infatuation which partakes of the extravagance and which makes even me laugh when I think about it"(57). Botany unfolds as the paradoxical pleasures of being "depriv[ed]" by "giv[ing] myself up." Echoing the line of praxis he laid out in the *Confessions,* Rousseau, this time, finds himself "sixty-five plus," a "doddering old man, who is already decrepit and sluggish and without aptitude or memory" brought "back to the exertions of youth and the lessons of a schoolboy." Belatedly, Rousseau discovers himself coming to reside in the *figure against which he had hoped to judge himself,* as relieved of "aptitude" and "memory," a paradoxical loss of usefulness that awakens the point-less "exertions of youth."

If the *Reveries* enacts the relaxation of paranoia and vulnerability to universalization to which Rousseau's name has been attached, the conclusion of figure that defines his *life* in the figure of the botanist, this time turned *not toward infinity* but toward bodily limitations and life's

finitude. What matters is not the "science of words" that botanical nomenclature appears to be—not that naming displaces seeing—but that describing means learning to see. But what is it that the botanist sees? Theresa Kelley has pointed out that debates over nomenclature and the purpose of botanical structures eluded Linnaean taxonomic determination often produced a more socially astute, less systematic language than Foucault's genealogy permits. For Rousseau in the *Reveries*, botanical study offers a corrective in shaping "man" in a very general capacity.

Medicinal ideas "wither the diversity of colors in the meadows and the splendor of the flowers, dry up the freshness of the groves, and make greenery and shady spots insipid and disgusting. All these charming and gracious structures barely interest anyone who only wants to grind it all up in a mortar"(*Reveries* 60). The point is not the privilege of aesthetic enjoyment or a disdain for practical knowledge but to bring to relief the "wither[ing]" effects of a practical vision, of the actualization of plant life for a purpose instead of the uncanny ability of plant life to withdraw man from his. Rousseau provides an anecdote of the "fine wit from Paris, seeing in London a connoisseur's garden full of rare trees and plants, cried out as his sole praise: 'That is a very fine Apothecary's garden. By this account, the first Apothecary was Adam, for it was not easy to imagine a garden better stocked with plants than the Garden of Eden"(60). Rousseau implies that in his pedantry, the "apothecary" loses the "Garden of Eden" by neglecting the "gracious structures" with an eye only to "grind it all up in a mortar." But by the same turn, appears to cast botanical "seeing" as a way of restoring a "natural" delimitation to the horizon of the human—like the recurring figures of the dotard and the child who "do nothing" in spite of their activities—making time for the elegance of structure not only stays the hand that picks and nourishes but reiterates, in a different form, the latency, the withdrawn actualization of human activity.

The botanist is *made* leisurely and idle despite himself: "Plants are naturally within our reach. They are born under our feet and in our hands, so to speak; and the smallness of their essential parts sometimes conceals them from plain view the instruments which reveal them are much easier to use than those of astronomy." Unlike the stars above, "plants" appear to have been "born" to within our grasp, inviting to "feet" and "hands" without ingenious appendages except the occasional magnifying glass. Rousseau continues: "Botany is a study for an idle and lazy solitary person: a point and a magnifying glass are all the apparatus he needs to observe plants. He walks about, wanders freely from one object to another examines each flower with interest and curiosity, and as soon as he begins to grasp the laws of their structure, he enjoys, in observing them, a painless pleasure as intense as if it had cost him much pain." If mimesis can be described as a rigorous activity of reason adapting to nature for its optimization, what Rousseau describes is the mirror-image of the enlightenment figure of Odysseus that Adorno and Horkeimer enlists, the absurdity of the botanist who is made "lazy" and "solitary" by the seductions of nature, who moves from flower to flower, but unlike the pollinating insect, with no procreating or nourishing drive. The strange redundancy of the phrase "painless pleasure" evokes the pleasures of discovering a "law" that needs no authority, a joy that dispels any suggestion of jouissance, of finding pleasure in the pain of obedience.

1. Coda: Posthuman Limits?

Finally, there is in Rousseau's pedagogy, a mode of self-relation that *detaches,* or rather, allows attachments to pass away, that illuminates the intense energies expended in tapping into what is always "in reserve." The Edenic practice of botany, the "sight" it requires, is contrasted to the demands exacted on man by the "mineral realm" in the famous passage of the "Seventh Walk":

> In itself, the mineral realm has nothing lovely or attractive. Its riches, sealed up within the bosom of the earth, seem to have been removed from the sight of man so as not to tempt his cupidity. They are there, as though in reserve, to serve one day as a supplement to the genuine riches more within his reach and for which he loses taste to the extent that he becomes corrupted. Thus he must call on industry, labor, and toil to relieve his misery…. He flees the sun and the day which he is no longer worthy to see. He buries himself alive and does well, no longer deserving to live in the light of day. There, quarries, pits, forges, furnaces, an apparatus of anvils, hammers, smoke, and fire replace the gentle images of pastoral occupations. The wan faces of the wretches who languish in the foul fumes of the mines, of grimy ironsmiths, of hideous Cyclopes are the spectacle the apparatus of the mine substitutes, in the bosom of the earth, for that greenery and flowers, of azure sky, of amorous shepherds, and of robust plowman on its surface (Rousseau 62).

Correlative to the innocuous, liberating "seeing" that botany enables is the original sin of digging into the earth, a breaking of the "surface" that as we have seen in the "Fifth Walk" and elsewhere, sustains the promise of human happiness." The overflow of industrial activity becomes visible in the substance of the human, "the wan faces of the wretches who languish in the foul fumes of the mines" an image that reflects the pollution of industrial activity but also, Rousseau intimates, the "spectacle" that cannot but also transform the open air of "robust plowman" and "amorous shepherds" on the surface. The "health" of the surface—the genre of the pastoral in which the *Reveries* can be uneasily grouped—once opened to the bowels of the earth, cannot but acquire the character of something *material,* something *inhuman* by virtue of its capacity to be contaminated by the phantom "substitutions" already taking place. As Derrida's reading reminds us, this "unhealthy" trade, removed from sight, presupposes a "lack" in nature that must be supplemented by human activity, a present tense activity we might say, *already at work* in the uncomfortable figuration of ecological relation. As Derrida continues: "Nature does not supplement itself at all; Nature's supplement does not proceed from Nature, it is not only

inferior to but other than Nature"(145).[176] Here, even the most elegant abstractions of ecological relation, of "living together" is haunted by an over-investment in the supplement. For instance, Haraway, wary of the anthropocentric nomenclature of the Anthropocene, urges critics of the "Chthulucene" to tell other stories:

> One must surely tell of the networks of sugar, precious metals, plantations, indigenous genocides, and slavery, with their labor innovations and relocations and recompositions of critters and things sweeping up both human and nonhuman workers of all kinds. The infectious industrial revolution of England mattered hugely, but it is only one player in planet-transforming, historically situated, new enough, worlding relations. The relocation of peoples, plants, and animals; the leveling of vast forests; and the violent mining of metals preceded the steam engine; but that is not a warrant for wringing one's hands about the perfidy of the Anthropos, or of Species Man, or of Man the Hunter (48).

Haraway is certainly right the focus of ecological thought, its splintering into questions of "economy" and "justice" overlook the devastating and surprisingly resilience of displacements that are *not human*—yet as Rousseau lets us see, there is something odd about drawing *plants* into "worlding relations," remaking them into "planet transforming" relations. For instance, Haraway's reinterpretation of a well-known ecological coupling, the acacia and the ant, leads her to revise her ideas of "plants":

> Plants are consummate communicators in a vast terran array of modalities, making and exchanging meanings among and between an astonishing galaxy of associates across the taxa of living beings. Plants, along with bacteria and fungi, are also animals' lifelines to communication with the abiotic world, from sun to gas to rock (122).

Plants, here, become "communicators" with the *abiotic,* not what guides the subject along the surface but a way of accessing the mineral, his frantic self-touching. To what extent must the vegetal become "vast terran array of modalities," the very modalities that for Rousseau, prompts the subject to *turn back*? If for Rousseau, turning toward toward the "*skin "*of an earthly relation

[176] Derrida, Jacques, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Of Grammatology.* Fortieth Anniversary edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.

is to enable affections to pass away, the earthly is perhaps, incompatible with the very project of social, of using the "abiotic" to *make* "lifelines."

Rousseau recounts a comedy of manners at the end of the "Seventh Walk." While walking along the Isère, Rousseau begins eating berries from a thorny bush and unwittingly invites the intervention of the friend of his walking companion: "Hey, Sir! What are you doing there? Don't you know this fruit is poisonous?' 'This fruit is poisonous?" I cried out, completely surprised. 'Without a doubt,' he replied, 'and everyone knows it so well that nobody in the region would think of eating them.' I looked at the Squire Bovier and said to him: 'Why, then, didn't you warn me?' 'Ah, sir,' he replied to me in a respectful tone, 'I didn't dare take that liberty.' (67). Here the "liberty" is not that of Jean-Jacques to pick at will but that of the "knowing" Squire to intervene. The exaggerated propriety (or irony) of the Squire Bovier can be read, at the end of the story, as a kind of revision of Biblical transgression—the "fallen" knowledge "intervenes" precisely because it is capable of taking "liberty" as "between" him and Jean-Jacques, not as what is constantly asserted in action, but what can be perceived as what is "not taken" *from* Jean-Jacques. Such a withholding leaves room for the freedom of the garden itself for a transgression retroactively reprieved*,* a harmless discovery of what is off limits.

CHAPTER FOUR: THINKING LIKE MAN WITH SHELLEY'S *QUEEN MAB*

> What better way to redeem the Earth (and to save one's soul) than to totally dismantle the Earth and rebuild it to human specifications, gene by gene, or molecule by molecule?
>
> —-George Sessions, "Deep Ecology & the New Age."[177]

> There's not one atom of yon earth
> But *once was* living man;
> Nor the minutest drop of rain,
> That hangeth in its thinnest cloud,
> But flowed in human veins:
>
> —Percy Shelley, *Queen Mab* (II. 211-5).[178]

Radical Poetics

In the introduction, I proposed that this project is partly my sense that we re-mystify "nature*"* through our attempts to demystify it *as knowable only as "material phenomena" measurable by the "socioeconomic"* or "geological" or "ecological" conditions it generates and participates in, a method that risks committing to a similar posture of *mastery* that either keeps intact or reinvetsts in biopolitical formations that Foucault calls *"*concrete arrangements [agencements concrets]"(*History* 140). [179] Throughout my chapters, I have attempted to resituate and play this impulse among methodologies classified as "Romantic," attuned to the displacements and generic inflections they generate in order that might take the impulse to think ecologically as a vulnerable and susceptible epistemic practice, contingent and dependent upon

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[177] Sessions, George, ed. *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century.* Boston: Shambhala, 1995. 297.

[178] Italics mine. All in text citations from *Queen Mab* and Shelley's "Notes to *Queen Mab"* are taken from *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* Vol. 2. Ed. Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.

[179] Accounts of biopower that focus purely on the material means of production are also limited by their approach. I disagree fundamentally with the idea that *power can purely work on the level of the physical* without traversing the discursive-subjective. I hope I have made clear that in my readings, the Foucauldian understanding of power works by seeming to be "*making subjects,*" beginning with abstract conceptualization and inviting reflexive identification *with the manipulation of corporeal needs*.

the displacements it enables us to collective, and generative of autobiographical and pedagogical discourses through which the past becomes accessible. I have described this as a process of *becoming implicated,* of becoming sensitive to different manners of "having been" that poetic epistemologies generate. The possibility of a Romantic ecocritical practice, I maintain, comes especially into relief within the demand to recover from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a clear ecological history, its political and "socioeconomic" categories of organization, a demand that appears itself to repeat the ascendency of political-economic discourses attached to the names of Thomas Malthus and Adam Smith. In this chapter, I address the possibility of a more *radical* poetics of ecological thinking introduced by Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1813 didactic romance *Queen Mab,* a poem *through* a poetic response that emerges *through* tracing colonializing geographies, an assertion of spatialization of the globe that reanimates older cosmologies, generating a profusion of affinities.[180] *Queen Mab* articulates Shelley's political hopes invested in a pedagogy proper to poetic "nature" that would join the earth in "consentaneous love."

Written during his stay in Edinburgh and York between 1811 and 1812, the poem follows a series of attempts to develop a polemic against Parliamentary policies of high tariffs and trade embargos that exacerbated famine and poverty in Scotland and Northern England.[181] By unequivocally condemning the effects of Parliamentary policy on England's domestic and

[180] I am influenced here by Amanda Goldstein's resonant argument for a politically engaged pedagogy: "pedagogy is political: full of conscious and unconscious choices about which particular histories to see and to tell, and which explanatory structures and contexts to furnish for their assimilation."

[181] See Shelley's poems written between 1809 and 1812 in the Esdaile Notebook. For biographies of Shelley, see Cameron, Kenneth Neill. *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical.* New York: Macmillan, 1950 and *The Godwins and the Shelleys*.

colonial populations, Shelley's poetics uneasily echoes figures from both early nineteenth-century discourses of life and a proto-technological discourse akin to what Michel Foucault identifies as an emergent "geographical, climatic, [and] hydrographic environment," emerging within Foucault's own epistemic inquiry is the articulation of an environment "that it is not a natural environment," but is "created by the population and therefore has effects on that population."[182] Foucauldian methodology informs of contemporary attempts to construct, as Alf Hornburg, Brett Clark, and Kenneth Hermele define it, "a long-term, historical understanding of how local and global power struggles shape the trajectories of human–environmental relations."[183] We revisit Shelley's *Queen Mab,* then, amidst the historical convergence between an insistence upon the "emergence" of a spatializing "environmental *power"* and the poetic *effects felt within linguistic-epistemological attempts to grapple* with its possibility. *Queen Mab,* I argue, poses pertinent questions about *how the legibility of "power"* is itself bound up with both a *teleology* and its resistance. The very terms that impose a "natural environment" provisionally aligned with power, Shelley shows, activates and politicizes a *poetics* drawn from epicurean and empirical science. Articulating the "material" conditions of the environment becomes *a practice* of attending to the varietals of "nature," and the surprising manner of their accessibility *within figures of power* and the requisite, performative *histories* poetry can generate.

I am far from the first to note that a teleological narrative of *Queen Mab,* stretching prophetically across past, present, and future appears to invite "embedding" within the emergent

[182] Foucault, Michel. Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76. Ed. Mauro. Bertani et al. New York: Picador, 2003. 245.

[183] Hornborg, Alf., Brett. Clark, and Kenneth Hermele, eds. Ecology and Power: Struggles over Land and Material Resources in the Past, Present and Future. London: Routledge, 2012. 2.

epidemiological and ecological discourses of *modernity.* Studies including Alan Bewell's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease,* Nahoko Alvey's *Strange Truths in Undiscovered Lands*, and Timothy Morton's many reinterpretations of *Queen Mab as an instance of the seductive "surfaces" of capital* see the poem as both resisting and shaping, with questionable degrees of success, an emerging epidemiological, political, and ecological repercussions of British imperialist expansion.[184] Setting aside the limited early success of the poem, *Queen Mab* appears both a fitting and bizarre candidate for the title of "a poem of the England of 1812," asserting confidently its philosophical credentials and the synthetic, poetic tradition it appears to integrate.[185] Presciently challenging the tendency to recast pre-Waterloo revolutionary hopes as irrevocably severed from the post-Waterloo restoration, Shelley, I want to propose, postulates a prehistory of modern "man" elaborated through the historical "likenesses" of man in nature, modeling a *utopian polemic* that repeatedly *marks encounters with a different history*. If, as Anahid Neressian claims, recent Romanticism criticism contends with unfolding divisions between a bad "natural" and a good "natural," unraveled along the lines of the organic/essential and the natural historical respectively, these bifurcations perhaps bear disproportionate weight owing to the contemporary historiographic *pressures to materialize* an ecological, biophysical horizon within nineteenth-century anthropology.[186] As such, read within the context of the

[184] See Alvey, Nahoko Miyamoto, Strange Truths in Undiscovered Lands: Shelley's Poetic Development and Romantic Geography. University of Toronto Press, 2009. Bewell, Alan. *Romanticism and Colonial Disease.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. Both are hereafter cited in text. For more on Shelley and ecology, see also Timothy Morton's excellent work *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste, The Unfamiliar Shelley*, and his various essays including "Shelley's Green Desert," "Romantic Disaster Ecology: Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley," "The Notes to Queen Mab and Shelley's Spinozism," and "Queen Mab as Topological Repertoire."

[185] Kenneth Neill Cameron, via Reiman, 161.

[186] See Nersessian, "Romantic Ecocriticism Lately"

discourses we *position as emergent, Queen Mab* confounds this ahistorical, retroactively discernible anthropological formation by forcing us to attend to the poetic resonances of "hope" and "anarchy" antithetical to an environment predicated upon the signification of power.[187] In what follows, I will sometimes invoke Bruno Latour's *Gaia* as a contrasting presence. At the risk of inviting charges of anachronism, my point is not to paint Latour as the villain or to cast Shelley and Latour as opposites, but to note an important *difference* that crystallizes two contrasting epistemological methodologies for thinking "planetarily." Latour's pedagogies come across as dystopian, I propose, because of the presupposed participation of the "natural" in methodologies for "remaking" oriented toward making the teleological systematization of the planet progressively *real.* An environmentalism that seeks to do away with "listening" and "learning" from nature sees the persistence of "poetic" pedagogies that continue to illuminate the *incompleteness* of modernity resonant echoes of a *different "nature"* that continue to addresses us.

From Necessity to Contingency

Shelley's title page openly acknowledges the poet's debts and borrowings for ideas, images and turns of phrase. Here, the genre of romance inaugurated by the Fairy Mab appears to acknowledge, within the poem's explicit showcase of its erudition, the susceptibility of *philosophical poems* in general to accusations of sophistry and with it, and its willingness to

[187] Here, see Fredric Jameson's comments on how "what Raymond Williams has usefully termed "residual " and " emergent" forms of cultural production-must make their way. If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable. I am not sure that this must be the case, especially while reading Shelley *engages precisely both discourses,* our retroactive impulse to discern, and a *different, enthusiastic fascination with Queen Mab engages in its unraveling.*

engage the very same the critical energies for its own purposes. The twice-qualified full title, "Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem: with Notes," situates the Shelley's polemic in a tradition of natural philosophy and Lucretian revivals, especially in relation to Erasmus Darwin's works *The Botanical Garden* and *The Temple of Nature*, along with the necessitarianism of William Godwin's *Enquiry into Political Justice*, and the more overtly melancholic forms of material decay visible in Baron D'Holbach's *System de la Nature* and C. F. Volney's *Les Ruines*.

With an eye on the demystifying capacities poetry, I turn first to the very particular philosophical space Shelley carves out for "natural philosophy" within the resemblances romance itself is permitted to accrue. David Duff observes in *Romance and Revolution*, Shelley composed Mab in the densely allegorical rhetoric drawn from the debates of the 1790s, a vernacular that by 1812 would have struck the casual reader as out of fashion.[188] Natural "discovery" becomes synonymous with noting, not alienable qualities, but the enthusiastic *effects* of appraising and articulating the historical dimension of "organization." As many readers of Shelley's materialism have noted, Shelley's interest in natural-scientific discovery cannot be thought apart from a world becoming lighter and more amenable to "play" in its figurative fecundity, especially in the reflective resemblances within delineations of the "micro" or the "global." Hugh Roberts proposes that Shelley's abiding concern is "with eliminating the known present rather than achieving a posited future."[189] Yet even so, "eliminating" perhaps obscures Shelley's interest in the surprisingly interruptive impact of microscopic visions that suggest alignments of individual passions and pursuits can generate change. Shelley's 1811 letter to

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[188] Duff, David. Romance and Revolution : Shelley and the Politics of a Genre. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 58-60.

[189] Roberts, Hugh. *Shelley and the Chaos of History: a New Politics of Poetry.* University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.

Elizabeth Hitchener during the composition of *Queen Mab* proposes: "I will say, then, that all nature is animated; that microscopic vision, as it has discovered to us millions of animated beings whose pursuits and passions are as eagerly followed as our own, so high it, if extended find that nature itself was but a mass of organized animation. Perhaps the animated intellect of all this is in a constant rotation of change: perhaps a future state is no other than a different mode of terrestrial existence to which we have fitted ourselves in this mode."[190] Remarkably, in proposing a "mass of organized animation," microscopic vision renders "nature" not only composite, but less focused on organization than the capacity of individual "passions" and "pursuits" to align as if seeming to have been "organized." An emancipatory movement that pulsates through the anaphoric repetition of "perhaps" whereby the initial, vague designation of excessive "animation" begins to signify "pursuits and passions eagerly followed." Microscopic vision enables what *looks like* "follow[ing]" passions and pursuits to *look like* an "organization" that eludes us, in relation to which our present itself begins to appear less determinant, as merely having been "fitted" into a particular "mode of terrestrial existence." Such a difference suggests, not so much the recuperation of knowledge *about micro*-"beings" but an energetic experience, *within similitude* of an ecstatic, "constant rotation of change" that composite interaction generates by becoming partially individuated, becoming a "mass" of organization.

Godwin's necessitarian influence provides a way of *reading* the emancipatory *sensation* of being "compelled*"* to freedom by the corrective powers of *similitude*. Here, Shelley's thinking echoes a reflexive aspect of necessitarianism, Godwin elaborates upon this point in Book IV of his *Enquiry into Political Justice*:

[190] Shelley, Percy Bysshe, and Frederick L. Jones. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Vo.1 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964. 229

> Lastly, it may be observed upon the hypothesis of free will, that the whole system is built upon a distinction where there is no difference, to wit, a distinction between the intellectual and active powers of the mind…What indeed is preference, but a perception of something that really inheres or is supposed to inhere in the objects themselves? It is the judgment, true or erroneous, which the mind makes respecting such things as are brought into comparison with each other. If this had been sufficiently attended to, the freedom of the will would never have been gravely maintained by philosophical writers, since no man ever imagined that we were free to feel or not to feel an impression made upon our organs, and to believe or not to believe a proposition demonstrated to our understanding (Godwin IV 5).[191]

Godwin wishes to *outline* a passive epistemic subject that freely "receives." Yet to dispense with the will, he must give incredible latitude to "impression[s] made upon our organs" and "propositions demonstrated to our understanding." To admit nature's necessity means, not engaging our energies in propping up a "system," but submission to a continuous process of correction through *making judgments*, to the attenuations by "propositions" and "impressions" that re-orient the "feeling" and "belief" of the subject. Every judgment therefore facilitates, in theory, an experience of necessity. Shelley, I propose, repurposes Godwin's approach to "necessity" in *Queen Mab* by engaging the subversive epistemic telos of observation that proceeds through comparison, stressing the surprising experience of political and social *"contingency*" that inheres in others "like" but not me, organized as I "might" be. As Julie Carson puts it in her aptly titled and incisive essay "The Feel of Shelley's Similes," the Shelleyan simile enables "otherwise disparate energies to cohere for a time in such new-found alliances toward legal, political, and literary form," and "forging a notion of causality that is less driven by necessity."[192] Chiming with his famous pronouncement in the *Defence* that "Reason respects differences, poetry the similitude of things," similitude can address our imagination as

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[191] *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice: with Selections from Godwin's Other Writings*. Edited by K. Codell Carter, Clarendon P., 1971.

[192] Faflak, Joel, and Richard C. Sha, eds. Romanticism and the Emotions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 77-8. Hereafter cited in text.

shifts in apprehension without having to colonize the things themselves.[193] In the revised published ending of Godwin's *Things as They Are; Adventures of Caleb Williams,* Mr. Collins explains to the titular character ten years after the events of the novel: "you did not make yourself…you are what circumstances irresistibly compelled you to be."[194] This pronouncement, I propose, receives its utopian echo in Stuart M. Sperry would call the "vision of a grand and irresistible destiny" of Queen Mab*,* where the self-evidence of teleological history also releases the *pressures of fulfillment*, to "make yourself" according *to how we think things should be.* [195] Taking our cue from Godwin's didactic novel (a novel that itself finds likenesses and intertwined fates difficult to untangle), we might say that Shelley is less interested in the *feeling of necessity in a narrative* than in the sense of being "irresistibly compel[led]" by visions of *likeness* that entangle us with much more than our own bodies and fates, but the political fate of disparate places.

Passing Allegories

Perhaps owing to the peculiar place of *Queen Mab* in Shelley's own oeuvre derived from the previously, widely-held consensus that Shelley "outgrew" the poem and Shelley's own vehement condemnation of the poem as "villainous trash," *Queen Mab* can be said to embody a particular political moment (*Letters* 158). Read as the concatenation of different voices and contexts, the press wars of the 1790s, the domestic conditions prior to the fall of Napoleon,

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[193] Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism.* Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York: Norton, 1977.

[194] Godwin. *Things as They Are or the Adventures of Caleb Williams.* 321.

[195] See Sperry, Stuart M. Shelley's Major Verse: the Narrative and Dramatic Poetry. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988. 2.

Britain's rapid imperialist expansion and fringe nationalist resistance to expansion, *Queen Mab* is exemplary in the way the poem attempts to hold these contexts in suspension through its investment in "utopian," environmental transformation. The romance narrative of *Mab* is peculiarly framed by Ianthe's lover Henry who, though "watching her in sleep/ with looks of speechless love"(X. 238-9), does not appear until the completion of the dream. Placing himself on the margins of a dream between feminine spirits, Shelley depicts the flight that lifts the "Spirit" of Ianthe from her body as the discovery of the likeness of body and soul. Body and soul share the "self-same lineaments, the same/ Marks of identity were there" (I. 126-9). The separation of soul and body is itself denoted in the fleeting, surprising identification with the body, the "self-same lineaments" as "marks of identity" suggests a *manner of marking the body as what* possesses a soul. That unlike the soul, the body "fleets through its sad duration rapidly;/ Then like a useless and worn-out machine/ Rots, perishes, and passes"(I. 154-6). *This ascension* enables the Spirit to mark its "fleeting" and "sad duration," but the interjection of "then" displaces the body's perishable quality from a presupposed substance to a likeness; that the body is "like a useless and worn-out machine," elides its material determination while preserving the truth of the body's fate.

These subtle shifts enabled by *likeness* continue into the celestial spheres. In ascending, the Spirit breaks "the chains of earth's immurement" in order to feel "apprehension uncontrolled" and "New raptures opening round"(I. 189-94). Seeing the earth in the distance, the Spirit perceives a "vast and shadowy sphere" while "sun's unclouded orb/ Rolled through the black concave" (I. 242-43).[196] Aligning *the sun with what is "un-clouded"* and the earth as

[196] There are a number of similarities between Shelley's thought and Deleuze's definition of the event. Deleuze writes for instance that. What I wish to stress here is not a Deleuzian reading of Shelley—insofar as I do not think Shelley ever collapses the passion of the lyrical dimension into the *becoming actual* of an assemblage.

"shadowy sphere," and yet to be illumined, Shelley reminds us in his "notes" to the poem that distance is measured by light, and that "light consists either of vibrations propagated through a subtle medium, or of numerous minute particles repelled in all directions from the luminous body"(*Notes* 239). Invoking a Dantean cosmology of a composite chorus contained in crystalline spheres, Shelley discovers moving figures for these poetic shifts in the "illuminations" composed of "vibrations" and "particles repelled" providing the requisite figures for reinterpreting what "light" as what is felt by becoming a medium, propelling through resistance. The eye attests, turning back to earth:

> The Spirit's intellectual eye
> Its kindred beings recognized.
> The thronging thousands, to a passing view,
> Seemed like an ant-hill's citizens.
> How wonderful! that even
> The passions, prejudices, interests,
> That sway the meanest being—the weak touch
> That moves the finest nerve
> And in one human brain
> Causes the faintest thought, becomes a link
> In the great chain of Nature! (II. 97-108)

Akin to "microscopic" vision, the Spirit's planetary vision sees "thronging thousands" that "seemed like" a republic of "citizens," surprised by the glimpse of polity.[197] By emphasizing the *impact of seeming like* "republic," Shelley locates the power of the multitude neither in the identification with the collective or in the individual; the Spirit is certainly not "one" with the throng or part of it. Yet in recognizing her "kindred beings," an affinity defined by a shared

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[197] See by contrast the reverse movement that Edmund Burke stresses about individuation in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, that "the commonwealth itself would, in a few generations, crumble away, be disconnected into the dust and powder of individuality. And at length dispersed to all the winds of heaven." Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France.* (Ed. Frank M. Turner and Darrin M. McMahon. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 58.

descent and origin, she seems to surprise herself with *her own trajectory of becoming.* The "links" in the "great chain of Nature" trace a teleology of "becoming" marked by the movement of passion, and that culminates in the lyrical surprise of "How wonderful!" Here, "seeming like" a "citizen" does not force us to reflexively identify with abstract requirements of citizenship but depends on how the recognition of a polity *itself* is marks the "sway" of "passions, prejudices, and interests." The dash that joins the "sway" of "the meanest being" with the "weak touch" of the "finest nerve" re-orients the Spirit toward its susceptibility to altered trajectories of origination, a consciousness of its vulnerability bound up not only with its "nerves" but with the plight of the "meanest being." By stressing "likeness," Shelley contours *becoming a polity* with *becoming "moved,"* by a mysteriously sympathetic *plight.*

Here, by stressing not so much "participation" in a collective than intellectual "affinities" with the collective, Shelley hints at a poetic *allegory* not only with altered vectors of *impact*, but itself preoccupied with new possible "histories" of becoming. Associated with Edmund Spenser's The *Faerie Queene,* allegorical romance has often been read as conservative genre that coerces a passive reader into agreement with a ruling power, though as Duff points out, shifting allegiances during the press wars of the 1790s. Tracing allegory to its Greek etymology, Gordon Teskey defines allegory as an address to a gathering—the "agora"—and its initiation or transformation into a "chora."[198] Allegory both creates a bodily interiority and violently incorporates the interior by imprinting upon it, absorbing it into a single political voice. Teskey observes that what matters is not the moment of uncritical participation, of identifying with the collective but what occurs after the violent inclusion, when the subject re-inscribes the gesture of

[198] See Teskey, Gordon. *Allegory and Violence.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996. 124. Hereafter cited in text.

violent identification with the collective as an expression of power (125).[199] Shelley proposes, something quite different. Without conveying a power that actively *imprints* the multitude *with* memory of its participation in the collective, the Spirit moved by something *seeming* to be a "collective," a figure of comparison that enables her to receive the "republic" as a "likeness," a likeness whose perception relays a "kinship" drawn from the Spirit's awareness of its own vulnerability to alternative *ways of political living*.[200]

Imperial Expanses, Experimental Subversions

Transporting Ianthe across Asia and Africa, the Fairy Mab unfolds in the "sights" of ancient civilizations marked by a violence. Exotic places are already beginning to be forgotten or marked for erasure, conveying a force that becomes visible in their passing away. Nahoko Alvey points out that Shelley models the poem's spiritual guide, the Fairy Mab on the "Welsh Spirit" of Madoc associated with early nineteenth-century Celtic nationalist movements. Alvey argues persuasively that in drawing on a marginal Spirit of the colonial fringe, Shelley attempts a

[199] It is worth comparing Teskey's account to Paul de Man's *Rhetoric of Temporality."* For de Man, the allegorical sign comes after a prior sign with which it cannot coincide. Arriving always *after* the fiction of unity with the image has been dispelled, the subject differentiates itself from what is past and includes the past as self-expression. For Teskey's comments on de Man's understanding of the performative see pp.64-67

[200] Amanda Goldstein proposes a historical materialist reading allegory. In her reading the "Mask of Anarchy," she proposes the creation of substances that are frail but real through violence: "A sense awakening and yet tender / Was heard and felt—," Shelley rigorously activates both the sensory and the semiotic senses of sense. Here fresh meaning breaks or dawns with a tingling sensation, and the "abstraction" of allegory retains its etymological sense of something drawn off or away (abs + trahere) from another, by distillation or chemical sublimation rather than absolute distinction in kind. …. Shelley rigorously activates both the sensory and the semiotic senses of sense….Compounded up from the scene of the damage, then, this Shape presents an alternative etiology for political allegory as a "frail" but real production of beings and substances at the scene of a revealing political catastrophe."

"visionary construction of place" aimed at decentering Europe.[201] Shelley's insistence on a visionary "construction" through the already visible erasure of ancient topographies cannot quite be read as natural in its banal sense of mere erasure. Alvey critiques Shelley for the "lack of human participation [that] creates great discrepancies between the present and the nebulous future, between nature's will to erase human history from the earth and Shelley's wish to transform 'all-polluting luxury and wealth' into 'the labor of man.'"[202] Yet instead of pitting political participation *against natural erasure,* what similitude *claims* within the "labor of man" is also a sensuous "prehistory" of man itself, a response discernible within the articulated violence of imperial *geographies,* the similitudes that undo the very hold of a tyrannical space and ecology that thinking *planetarily* would appear to assert. Poetry, to borrow again from the *Defence,* what "perpetuates" the apprehension of "what is unapprehended," a course that can be read either *as* what is in danger of being pressed out of existence or made in visible within the registered tendencies of erasure.

In *Canto II* of Queen Mab, the Fairy reveals to the Spirit the ancient the ruins of Palmyra, the Pyramids of Egypt, and Solomon where "imposture/ Recites till terror credits, are pursuing/ itself into forgetfulness"(II. 159-61). The evacuation of tyrannical power leaves the once great cities of "Athens, Rome, and Sparta" a "moral desart" of "mean and miserable huts" (II. 158-5). To perceive tyranny "pursuing itself into forgetfulness" appears to suggest, within the figure of natural erasure itself, a violence that "forgets" its power. Seeking to render an" imposture" that

[201] The opening stanzas of *Queen Mab,* before the Fairy spins her pedagogical visions, deploys the irregular stanzas Shelley takes from Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer.* The affinity affirms Shelley's interest in a local myths and superstitions to *make* colonial power itself peripherial, and

[202] For instance, Richard Grove in *Green Imperialism* argues that Rousseau presides over an "environmentalism [that] was, to a great extent, born out of a marriage between physiocracy in the mid-eighteenth-century French obsession with the island as the speculative and Utopian location for the atavistic 'discovery' of idyllic societies or the construction of new European societies"(223).

"recites" but does not create, Shelley's lines anticipate a sense of the "desert" as a place in need of recollection, a place where power *asserts its own forgetfulness*. The "moral desert" becomes, in the Fairy's vision of an unnamed, flourishing ancient city, the site of a *pastoral pause.* Alvey argues "An ideal city is located far back in time and far away from Europe as a model that replaces London. While the influential power from the centre 'darts/ Like a subtle poison through the bloodless veins' of the political and commercial networks of the British Empire"(IV.105-6). Yet the pagan subtext of the "chance" city underscores the perspectival "point" of the traveler who is limited by a time not yet fixed, and whose *imperial* claims is itself contingent itself upon encounter. The Fairy laments:

> There the wide forest scene,
> Rude in the uncultivated loveliness
> Of gardens long run wild,
> Seems, to the unwilling sojourner, whose steps
> Chance in that desart has delayed,
> Thus to have stood since earth was what it is.
> Yet once it was the busiest haunt…(193-9).

The desert is not a "biological" desert; in fact, nature has drawn the remnants of a city into "forest scene" of "uncultivated loveliness" and gardens "run wild." Here, the figures of the "garden" and the "un-cultivated" tend toward a "civilization" made absent in the wild. If this invites the same complaint levied against Rousseau of an utopian, "virtuous," environment and speculative societies born from encounters with other indigenous populations, it also initiates a *counteracting ecological imagination,* contingent upon encounters with forgetting. The sojourner whose "steps/Chance…has delayed" elaborates a duration in having stood, that presents an unseen "past" transferred to the narrative temporality of "Yet once." [203] The Fairy's pedagogy

[203] Shelley's focus here is on human life, but, I think, extends broadly to all life insofar as the division between the living and the nonliving is *not* an ontological one but a sovereign decision, an arbitrary marking of power. For instance, insofar as forests are not participants in the drama of history, they are the province of the "nonliving."

resonates with Carl Schmitt's central complaint about the romantic subject as he who "takes everything as an occasion," who "in his organic passivity that belongs to his occasionalist structure, wants to be productive without becoming active."[204] Schmitt sees Romantic subject displacing "concrete reality" with "poeticizing," with a mere "verbal game" of a "fable" or a "poem." Yet Schmitt's perspective yields the response that an "occasionalist structure," is precisely what *spatialization itself,* the ahistorical spread of imperialist space, cannot but generate, "chance" forgettings, that underpin natural occurrence if not natural systems. Here, the accidental quality of a "delay" takes on the significance of "yet once," a time when a delay would not have been "accidental," and that is no less salient of an assertion about perception of place.

Shelley's dramatizes, quite explicitly in displacing "concrete reality" by having stood in the desart by chance, in marking the stranger's delay, that the "unapprehended" past resists the tyranny of the "desert." As Alan Bewell notes in *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* that Shelley and his contemporaries were keen to assert in their studies that parts of Africa and Asia have undergone drastic climatic and ecological changes, and that present-day stretches of arid desert used to be fertile farmland (Bewell 217-8). As Bewell attests, e*cological change* is never indifferent or objective for Shelley but *always social*, registered as "arable land" or "desert." Yet

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[204] Schmitt writes: "Goethe has the ability to connect small and insignificant occurrences with important events. Life is full of such accidents. "They constitute a game that, like all play, comes down to surprise and deception." According to Novalis, the conversation as well — this darling concept of romanticism—is a "verbal game," and according to Friedrich Schlegel, its theme is only a "vehicle" for the delight taken in the conversation…Thus in the romantic, it also turns out that there is a transformation of the world, but a different one from the one Fichte had postulated. It was transformation in play and the imagination, "poeticizing": in other words, the use of what is concretely given, even each sense perception, as the occasion for a "fable," a poem, an object of aesthetic sensation, or — because this best conforms to the etymology of the word romanticism—a novel [Roman]."

it would be reductive to account for this "human" aspect purely technologically. For the desert is also a manner of *rendering the present an accidental repetition of the past that lets the* past resurface *as* similitude, not by pulling the past into the familiarity of the present-tense, but letting the descriptions accrue in the encounter of the "delay," the sense of "place" to "whither, as to a common centre, flocked/ Strangers, and ships, and merchandize:/" where "Once peace and freedom blest"(II. 200-2). This capacious *opening what "once"* was enables a *social encounter with the past,* not merely a *social force of obliteration.*

As a student in Oxford, Shelley rhapsodized about developments in chemistry and physics that would transform the environment: "A spadeful of the modest productive soil does not to the eye differ much from the same quantity taken from the most barren. The real difference is probably very slight; by chemical agency the philosopher may work a total change, and may transmute an unfruitful region into a land of exhuberant plenty…Water, like the atmospheric air is compounded with certain gases: in the progress of scientific discovery a simple and sure method of manufacturing the useful fluid, in every situation and in any quantity may be detected: the arid deserts of Africa may then be refreshed by a copious supply, and may be transformed at once into rich meadows, and vast fields of maize and rice."[205] What "does not differ" to the eye may be the "slight" difference that conceals a "total change." Within *this* excitement of tapping into transformation can be heard*,* certainly the exercise of imperialist will that can transform anything *into* the *"rich meadows"* of England, but also the pedagogical resonances of a world tending toward the modal virtues that undermine the necessity of power to transform itself. The world is euphorically discovered to be, not as it always has been, sustained by sovereign power, but as liminal, teetering between "viable" and not viable, easily amenable to

[205] Hogg, Thomas Jefferson. Shelley at Oxford. London: Methuen & co., 1904. 18.

surprising disclosures and resistances overcome in a manner that *subverts* what the feigned necessity of the tyrannical exploitation of men. That the necessary "fluid" can be manufactured from "atmospheric air" *does not actually have to be carried out* to render arability and fertility of the land elegantly accessible to chemical study, a manner that also renders our demands less urgent, our sense of our surroundings less prone to the teachings of a Malthusian economy.

Julie Carson compares the promiscuous play of elemental composition to the Freudian children's game of "fort/da" aimed at "mastering" the mother's absence; the Shelleyan child "strings together particularities that are themselves insubstantial, already rendered elemental, as if to facilitate ever-fresh connection making and a conceptualization of the object-world as mutable, ever-changing, not simply there for the taking"(Carson 83-4). I would add that such "play," depends, not so much on an emphasis on mutability itself but its *experience as constantly reducing the distance between* distinctions of *past and present,* viable and nonviable, and *with it,* the requisite organizing *power* necessary, to mobilize "habitable" changes.

Shelley's passions about the accessibility of the world through pedagogy appears to be the utopian inversion of a techno-future where we rely on refashioning the world atom by atom, with immense effort, because we have no choice. I find it useful here to compare Shelley's sense of experimentally available, accessible world to Latour's account of "composing" an earth by insinuating ourselves into its needs, it's structures and loops. Latour resembles vitalist accounts of Romantic form*,* by Denise Gigante in particular, that emphasize its dynamism, its "procreative" and "unpredictive" vitality (5). Relying on a homology between poetic form and epigenesis, Gigante paradoxically *concretizes* form through its participation in a "monstrous" becoming, as what fixes and actualizes our anxieties of going "wrong" in the "developmental process"(6). Latour's account similarly invests in the concretization of the cybernetic loop itself:

"The slow operation that consists in being enveloped in sensor circuits in the form of loops: this is what is meant by "being of this Earth"(139). [206] The juxtaposition of the two methods illuminate the *requirement from us* that inheres in the *actualization* of feedback loops. Latour describes insinuating into and becoming trapped in the anxieties of atmospheric condition:

> It is rather that we have to slip into, envelop ourselves within, a large number of loops, so that, gradually, step by step, knowledge of the place in which we live and of the requirements of our atmospheric condition can gain greater pertinence and be experienced as urgent (140).

Unlike Shelley, for whom a "slight difference" can be imagined, through elemental recombination, to affect a "total transformation," this act of "slip[ping] into," of "envelop[ing] within" *loops,* is to experience and manage the "urgency" of an atmospheric condition always at risk of going wrong. Aesthetic and emotive responses create "a slow, gradual fusion of cognitive, emotional, and aesthetic virtues thanks to which the loops are made more and more visible." Ethical and emotional expressions are reinscribed as concretized loops, activated by and dependent upon our "sensitiv[ity] and reactiv[ity] to the fragile envelopes we inhabit"(140). [207]

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[206] Latour derives his forward-looking ecology from the cybernetic philosophies of James Lovelock, who first introduced the "Gaia Hypothesis" in 1972. Since the late nineties, the figure Gaia has since seen a remarkable revival in environmental studies. In his millennial update of *Gaia,* Lovelock proposes that the Earth behaves as a "self-regulating system," with complex feedback loops that join physical, biological, chemical, and human components across different and temporal scales. [206] For Lovelock, air, water, and soil pollution, the accumulation of plastic waste, and the excessive burning of fossil fuels can be read as the "diseases" of human activity. "Humans," an invasive species, must work to achieve a "symbiosis," a "lasting relationship of mutual benefit to the host and the invader"(Lovelock xv). Coexistence with planetary ecosystems can only be sustained by submitting, as much as possible, to the interests of the earth. Remembered for his techno-optimism, Lovelock proposes that geoengineering solutions are likely the only response to the climate and ecological crises (163-86).

[207] Latour, Bruno, and Catherine Porter. *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime.*Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017. Hereafter cited in text.

Atomic Cosmologies

Queen Mab imparts upon Ianthe a temporally heterogeneous atomic cosmology: "every grain/Is sentient both in unity and part, /And the minutest atom comprehends/ A world of loves and hatreds"(IV.142-5). The figure of the atom entangles us in causation but also in "will and thought and action, all the germs/ Of pain or pleasure, sympathy or hate"(IV. 148-9). Yet in *Queen Mab*, Shelley's atoms are not merely elemental but finite structures that "comprehends," in their movements histories, addressing us *having been* and what is no longer. Every atom is not merely an "organic unit" but, to borrow Schmitt's pejorative word, an "occasion," that reorients historical *becoming* of the Spirit:

> 'There's not one atom of yon earth
> But once was living man;
> Nor the minutest drop of rain,
> That hangeth in its thinnest cloud,
> But flowed in human veins;(II 211-5).

The "atom" of the "earth" teases out the historical flexibility enacted in Shelley's "once was." Hugh Roberts points out that the ordered universes of William Godwin and the Baron d'Holbach both seek to ward off the problem that Lucretian materialism itself introduces, the problem of the *clinamen*, the point at which atoms in the void "swerve." Godwin and d'Holbach both hesitate over whether nature's order would admit such chaotic movement (419). Akin to the movement of the "faintest thought," Shelley's elemental cosmology suggests much stranger relation to than the making of a system: "It is not minute events that have an impact on the development of the system as a whole that is remarkable—that is also true in a necessitarian system, which conserves ad infinitum the consequences of any action by the least of its components—it is the nature of these events and our relationship to them"(396). An atom of "the minutest drop of rain" and "flow[ed]" in "human veins" may be mistaken for the freedom of association that connects

whatever and whenever by verbalizing an arbitrary significance. Yet to think with Schmitt on this count would be to deny the peculiar historical difference the structure of the atom introduces. Christopher Miller observes that Shelley, despite becoming enamored with the Lucretian atom and its globular shape, uses atom in a very "un-Lucretian way," not only as a physical shape but as a "mental spark," which initiates a change.[208] If the atom signifies something preserved, the "drop" of rain proposes the passage of a human history from a "human body" into an atmospheric configuration, this surprise within a "drop of rain" introduces the *problem of historical reference that inheres in the figure of the atom itself,* as if *impacting* as what may or may not disclose itself. The emergence of distinct histories in the "minutest drop" sees the perceptive nuances of *becoming elemental* preserved in the duration of what "hangeth" in the "thinnest cloud," a "drop" that may fall or dissipate into the atmosphere. Amanda Goldstein, in her reading of Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy,* observes the inextricability of a *history of violence* from the very elaboration of a weather system, "an accentual-syllabically reconstructed story of droplets of violently spilled blood as they threaten to disappear, and reappear, in cycles of weather, water, and soil"(Goldstein187). Blood that returns as elemental *rain* could introduce the history of a "special sanction to the trade of blood" given in tyrannical civilizations, yet it also introduces its utopian inflection as what elided violence naturally (I. 158), as having "flowed" unremarkably in human veins.

This permissiveness of comparison within "atomic" history describes a microscopic history that not only may or may not disclose a surprising past, it circumscribes a point of comparison. To be an earthly subject is thus not to *lay claim to the domain of the microscopic*

[208] Miller, Christopher R. "Shelley's Uncertain Heaven." *ELH*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2005, pp. 577-603.

which we dominate because we are bigger but to be *exposed to figural transformation by an* impossibly an atmospheric and particulate one, drawn into a history of "viewless beings":

> How strange is human pride!
> I tell thee that those living things,
> To whom the fragile blade of grass,
> That springeth in the morn
> And perisheth ere noon,
> Is an unbounded world;
> I tell thee that those viewless beings,
> Whose mansion is the smallest particle
> Of the impassive atmosphere,
> Think, feel and live like man;
> That their affections and antipathies,
> Like his, produce the laws
> Ruling their moral state (II. 231-7)

The Fairy's metaphors are interwoven with similes, drawing what is inaccessible into a defamiliarizing likenesses. Shelley's diction entices with a profusion of the sensual and the familiar, the "fragile blade of grass" that "springeth" and "perisheth" ere noon, yet this confined and confining familiarity contours an "unbounded world," a figure that marks the un-binding of the microscopic world within metaphorical familiarity by making a familiar metaphor inaccessible simply by appealing to scale. To imagine the "mansion" of the "smallest particle," in other words, is to hollow out a particulate structure so that we begin to confuse our reference to one or the other, making room for inaccessible histories forced inward, where in order to know we would first become "viewless beings" that reside in the "impassive atmosphere."[209] Viewless and impassive, these figures disrupt, and emerge from the imperialist logic of an all seeing earth. To glimpse what is "like man" and "his" is thus not exactly to anthropomorphize but— to borrow a phrase from Frédéric Neyrat—to reflect upon the limits of his "interior colonization" of

[209] *Atopias: Manifesto for a Radical Existentialism*. First edition. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018. 49.

the other, enabling man to "yield" *within* his pleasurable mastery of cosmological discourse, countless other claims upon his "affections and antipathies" and forms of "laws" proper to their "moral state."

Becoming Satiated

To be enlightened then, is not to extend human qualities to nature, but to implicate the *self,* rendering it *vulnerable to adjustments,* acquiring different atomic and bodily histories. Fairy's attention to diet makes a similarly "occasionalist" adjustment –tyrannical power's primary, abstracting activity of "eating," of annihilating distinct atomic histories so that they become a greater collective acquires, Shelley suggests, its own productive perversions. Later, Shelley will take up the figure of famine and the procurement of nourishment more explicitly in his 1817 romance *Laon and Cythna* as a mode of revolutionary activity. Yet in *Queen Mab* though famine is everywhere marked, the Fairy focuses diet, especially its abuses and excesses, as the site of missed adjustments and the disclosure of utopian *inflections* power suppresses.

Acknowledging that tyrannical logic *is* a logic of consumption, Shelley's vegetarianism targets the pernicious arrangements of monarchic and ecclesiastical power that *insist upon "diet" as reflective of an exertion of power*. Shelley's pamphlet "A Vindication of a Natural Diet." Drawing on proposals for a vegetarian diet from Joseph Newton and the Bracknell circle, Shelley traces a history of tyrannical "passions" that address us as the *internal resistance of discernible within an* unnatural diet, one that acquires historical manner of address. Timothy Morton has written extensively on the language of diet and consumption in Queen Mab. Without rehearsing what Morton exposits, it is worth noting how the very articulation of a need that *can be satiated,*

skins or features that *betray a face,* become markers of incidents of violence, where bodily existence becomes bound up *with* subversive engagements *against exertions of sovereignty,* whose contortions itself become a source of poetic pleasure.

In "A Vindication of a Natural Diet," Shelley writes of Nero's "ungovernable propensities of hatred," the "bile-suffused cheek of Buonaparte, his wrinkled brow, and yellow eye, the ceaseless inquietude of his nervous system."[210] Here, a medical diagnostic becomes a political diagnostic: "ungovernable propensities" the "ceaseless inquietude," challenging the hold of tyranny by merely elaborating a description of health. To attribute to a tyrant a bodily nature—a nervous system agitated by biophysical activities—is to counteract the figure of the tyrant as the embodiment of sovereign will, tracing the harmful "renunciation of instinct as it concerns our physical nature," or more *to the point,* to retracing "instincts" activated by the rebellion of the body against the will. Vegetarianism is not only an alternative to the violence of meat-eating but *generates a utopian logic that imperialism itself activates*. Eat or be eaten can be rearticulated as a set of subversive bodily *possibilities that long toward* liberation, stringing together a different type of history made *palpable*:

> "What prolific sources of disease are not those mineral and vegetable poisons that have been introduced for its extirpation? How many thousands have become murderers and robbers, bigots and domestic tyrants, dissolute and abandoned adventurers, from the use of fermented liquors; who had they slaked their thirst only at the mountain stream, would have lived but to diffuse the happiness of their own unperverted feelings. How many groundless opinions and absurd institutions have not received a general sanction from the sottishness and intemperance of individuals? Who will assert that, had the populace of Paris drank at the pure source of the Seine, and satisfied their hunger at the ever-furnished table of vegetable nature that they would have lent their brutal suffrage to the proscription-list of Robespierre?"(16).

[210] Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Vindication of Natural Diet: Being One in a Series of Notes to Queen Mab : (a Philosophical Poem)*. New York: AMS Press, 1975. 15.

Shelley's questions begin to compose an emancipatory bodily "nature" from the vernacular of "hunger" and "thirst." The "mountain stream," and the "furnished table of vegetable nature" are less an impossible, Edenic relation with nature, than a force of virtue that can be heard in the diction of liquor and excess. If ideology tells us that liquor and excess leads to tyranny, then within the seemingly base impulses of "hunger and thirst" then, resides also a force of *un-perversion,* the tempering of "intemperance," that persist, not to be harnessed as a causal mechanism, but as the possibility of satiation that dissipates as pastoral happiness. Such a need asserts itself through the very articulation of needing to eat or drink. Only within this history does nature exerts its *claim, as* an emancipation *from the tyrannical will of the present* that reasserts itself, through the brutal violence of revolution as an alternative, a pastoral countenance of revolution as what is "cyclical," as a time or duration of "return."

In his critique of Monarchy, the Fairy steers the enchanted car to the court of what Morton memorably calls the "dyspeptic king"(172).[211] Sovereign will becomes a *venom* whose antidote resides in relaxing into satiation itself. Shelley takes up in his critique of the Prince Regent and his excessive indulgences as a metaphor for the voracious appetites of the empire. Earthly appetite, Shelley demonstrates, is not the corruption of a spiritual appetite but paradoxically, the persisting possibility of *releasing tyranny* from its ongoing abuses:

> Now to the meal
> Of silence, grandeur and excess he drags
> His palled unwilling appetite. If gold,
> Gleaming around, and numerous viands culled
> From every clime could force the loathing sense
> To overcome satiety, -if wealth
> The spring it draws from poisons not, -or vice,
> Unfeeling, stubborn vice, converteth not
> Its food to deadliest venom; then that king

[211] Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: the Body and the Natural World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

> Is happy; and the peasant who fulfils
> His unforced task, when he returns at even
> And by the blazing fagot meets again
> Her welcome for whom all his toil is sped,
> Tastes not a sweeter meal (III. 44-57).

The sovereign body's consumption is impelled by digestion, by "loathing sense" and frustrated "satiety"—the exotic, bodily blend of "numerous viands culled/from every clime" cannot accumulate as inert wealth or expressions of imperial power but by becoming ingested—part of a body that must not only eat but digest and in digesting, makes "deadliest venom." To consume, then, not to take in but to mark the body as inclined toward satiety, an expression that discovers its political, egalitarian expression in the peasant who has no wealth to convert to venom. The torturous syntax of the stanza joins, in an unlikely comparison, an excessive retroactive *desire* for satiation and the satiation that comes unbidden, of transgression that desires to "taste not," and he who naturally "tast[es] not," the peasant who "fulfil[s]" an "unforced task," and for whom literal taste is subordinate to the sweetness of company. Here, the pastoral receives less the quaint suspension of the will but the utopian possibility toward which *sovereign will itself bends, desires to realize.*

Throughout, the Fairy's pedagogy adjoins unlikely tendencies that tend toward *peace.* In the final Canto, the revelation of a future paradise to Ianthe, the Fairy Queen reveals the intermingling of natures (and not, as Bible implies of bodies) of lion and lamb:

> The lion now forgets to thirst for blood;
> There might you see him sporting in the sun
> Beside the dreadless kid; his claws are sheathed,
> His teeth are harmless, custom's force has made
> His nature as the nature of a lamb (VIII 124-8).

Timothy Morton points out in his appraisal of the poem's "topological repertoire" that Shelley's evocative lines present a likeness between lion and lamb that cannot be thought apart from the

figure of the simile. [212] Morton argues, astutely I think, that "Shelley's Lucretianism allows him to imagine a moment of "*clinamen*" during which these random vectors might start to be attracted towards one another to form worlds, even ecotopias. Morton wishes to interpret the clinamen as something that capitalism will grant, he writes, Shelley "rails against Adam Smith in *Queen Mab* V, but at the level of the ideologeme is expressed the hope that Adam Smith was right, and that an invisible hand will shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Morton assigns to the simile the role of the *clinamen* that merges, in brief glimpses the merging of the capitalist the natural. Yet Morton's formalism does not account for Shelley's experimentation with similitudes that thus far, does not require a "*hand*," where the very elisions of transformation may come, not from the forces of capital having *made something happen,* but a "natural philosophy" that *economy engages.*

The deictic "now" and "there" designates a temporal shift that incurs the surprise of finding the unfolding scene whose transformation is miraculous but merely grammatical. A "sport[ing]," "dreadless" and "sheathed" lion inscribes a change that is difficult to imagine, but easy to feel. Likeness asserts an experience, and contours return of the "past" around it. If the difference between the lion and the lamb vanishes, so, too, does the predator man and the colonial power. Restoring lion and lamb are not the sign, I think, of capitalism's unlikely transformations of lion into lamb, which no one would really want, but of the surprising potency of "custom's force" that comes from the seemingly annihilating temporal force it mobilizes. Our heavily symbolic investments in dichotomies, can, with perceptive reversal, enable *the* palpable,

[212] See Morton, Timothy. "Shelley's Topological Repertoire." For Morton, the work of Shelley's similes can be described by the aesthetic figure of a "fractal" that would bring together "heaven" and "earth," a figure that as we see, is a flattened, formal approximation of the "simile."

transformative power of custom to be felt internally, to be carried in the grammatical expressions that mark their penetration into past behavior. *Custom,* here, enables the space of the present to be amenable to transformation that is not violently asserted by the will, but marked by the annihilating effects of appending new suffixes "-ed," "-less," to beings. The protean adaptiveness of custom and satiation in Shelley's case for vegetarianism do not inhere in the imperative that readers adhere to a correct diet. That Shelley emphasizes, not adherence to custom, but the figure of custom that can not only assert the inevitability of power but itself can constitute a *response* to power by marking its boundedness to syntax and its capacity, therefore, to attach and release hopes from surprising objects.

Polluting Geographies

If vegetarianism, its tendencies toward satiety and healthy custom, is an effort so that as Shelley puts it, "no new diseases are generated," Shelley is clear that colonialism *is* itself a disease that generates its own tonic in the forms it colonizes and penetrates (*Vindication* 19). As Alan Bewell points out:

> … rather than seeing the physical environment as given, [Shelley] understands it as a product of social relations. This is why he refuses to separate ideopathology from the analysis of power. "Power" is a "desolating pestilence" that "Pollutes whate'er it touches." Literature has often employed epidemics as metaphors for social ills, but the environmental and demographic aspects of desolating go beyond metaphor to suggest that power is disease; it is the force that creates pathogenic spaces in the world" (Bewell 209).

Bewell argues convincingly that in the conquest of colonial spaces, "power" *is* disease and makes pathogenic "spaces." But how are we to understand this *strong, perplexing claim that power "is the force that creates pathogenic spaces?"* Here, Shelley seizes upon "venal interchange," as what technically, should not be an issue but what emerges within seemingly

abstract exchanges of commerce identified by thinkers like Adam Smith. Resonant, virutuous relations between "want," "demand" and "supply" emerge precisely through power's materialization *as* disease, where nature itself becomes contoured by the *utopian inversion of power's retreat,* of power's proliferation as what must have been possible:

> Hence commerce springs, the venal interchange
> Of all that human art or nature yield;
> Which wealth should purchase not, but want demand,
> And natural kindness hasten to supply
> From the full fountain of its boundless love,
> For ever stifled, drained, and tainted now.
> Commerce! beneath whose poison-breathing shade
> No solitary virtue dares to spring,
> But poverty and wealth with equal hand
> Scatter their withering curses, and unfold
> The doors of premature and violent death,
> To pining famine and full-fed disease,
> To all that shares the lot of human life,
> Which poisoned body and soul, scarce drags the chain,
> That lengthens as it goes and clanks behind (V. 38-52).

Shelley rejects the more favorable account of "commerce" given in Godwin's *Political Justice* and focuses, instead, on a the intrinsically stifling aspect of "venality," and the *spaces* it generates.[213] Allegorical landscapes, as Bewell and Richard Grove point out, appear to lean heavily on the concept of an "island" ecology, the elaboration of England against the spaces of imperial conquest, enjoining both places in a resistance *felt* in particularly environmental terms and, I think, begins to lay out an utopian *historicity*. Alan Weinberg argues succinctly that Shelley does not merely critique commerce but appropriates its form:

> Shelley projects a different form of 'commerce', one of 'sincerest virtue' wherein 'in just and equal measure all is weighed'. The balanced, measured, phrasing (mindful of Alexander Pope) sustains the image of a transaction, but withdraws any trace of profit or advantage from the exchange... Shelley posits a system of genuine equal sharing that

[213] Ruston, Sharon. Shelley and Vitality. Houndmills [England]: Palgrave Macmillan in association with Arts and Humanities Research Board, 2005.

> seems to recall primitive human systems of commonality or to imagine them as some future possibility.[214]

Weinberg is right to point to Shelley's interest in remaking *commerce* and *transaction,* seemingly carried by the grammar and vernacular of economy itself. Shelley does not merely "project" an utopian "form of commerce" but teases it from the limitless "demand*"* commerce imagines*,* tracing how "boundless[ness]" of "love," comes to be thinkable from the limitations of "supply," and "want" that exacts a "demand," one would "hasten" to supply.

Commerce as a "poison-breathing shade," conjures up for Shelley's nineteenth century readers the pestilential air of tropical spaces and Alvey points out, London and its commercial extensions that *make* "pining famine" and "full-fed disease"(Alvey 38), set both against the idea of Joseph Priestly who in contrast to Antoine Lavoisier, measured oxygen, or "vital air" by "goodness" or its conduciveness to life. In his demonstration that poor air quality can be restored through the introduction of plants, Priestly appears to demonstrate that the breath of man is sustained through the creations of God (Ruston 26-27). Although Priestly mostly limited his recommendation to the preservation of vegetal life, vegetal life becomes in the reception of Priestly's work a "power," for restoring a "healthy atmosphere." Such a planetary construction of space occurs by "suspending" *de facto* acceptance of "air" as neutral and universal. Yet as Shelley elaborates, it receives referential impact where "poison breathing shade" that "scatter their withering curse," propose the accessibility of "good air." The issue Shelley raises here, then, is not merely that power "constructs" ecologies, but that the constructedness of these ecologies depend upon *experiences of* "breathing," "scattering," and "exchange" as a *denial that nature can be virtuous.* At stake here, then, is a different model of human participation that

[214] Weinberg, Alan."'All Things Are Sold': The Degrading Intrusiveness of Commerce, with Reference to Shelley's 'Queen Mab'" The Keats-Shelley Review. 2006 20, no. 1: 102-118.103.

tends, not toward the artificial remaking of spaces but the visibility of the "natural" as a marker of the denial colonial and commercial power perpetuate by treating *air* only as the "winds" of commerce. Breath is figured not only by what originates in power, and what *power forces* through us, but is *vegetative,* and tending toward health but becoming repeatedly stifled as significations of commercial power.

Suspended Animation, Suspended Power

In the seventh stanza, Shelley's poem appears to reflect upon its own abiding preoccupation with power, a preoccupation that itself, comes to be stifling. As Ross Wilson astutely observes, the danger is always the life that does not live, or rather, "goes dead." Reading *Queen Mab* alongside Marxist thought, Wilson notes how the exploitation of labor lengthens life by transforming it into punishment, letting life "go dead in the very process of living," a plight exemplified by the "wonderous phantom" of Ahasuerus (Wilson 45). A predecessor for Ahasuerus appears in his 1810 poem "The Wandering Jew" where his characteristics more closely resemble nineteenth century reprisals of the figure: a figure of suspended animation—trapped in petrified movement. [215] Yet intriguingly, Ahasuerus is himself born from "human error's dense and purblind faith" and rises only to respond to the Spirit's question "Is there a God?"(VII. 83). Foucault's resonant formulation of "living" by "letting die*"* is certainly visible in the figures of the "scarce living," stifled by power, but if Ahasuerus, is also a figure of "response," by positing a history *older than divine power,* he also shifts our focus on what readers of Shelley gather as a problem of agency, of relying on nature alone to oppose power.

[215] For more on this point, see Weinberg, Alan M., and Timothy Webb. *The Neglected Shelley.* Farnham, Surrey : Ashgate Publishing Limited*, 2015*.

The figure of Ahasuerus in *Queen Mab* more closely resembles Milton's Satan or Prometheus in his "mockery" of a tyrant and his oppositional stance, reworking—as we have seen, the point of contact between earth and the power of the *voice:*

> Once his voice
> Was heard on earth; earth shuddered at the sound;
> The fiery-visaged firmament expressed
> Abhorrence, and the grave of Nature yawned
> To swallow all the dauntless and the good
> That dared to hurl defiance at his throne,
> Girt as it was with power (VII. 85-91).

Ahasuerus turns to the opening of Genesis where to inaugurate the presence of an omnipotent power, the firmament responds to an address from God. The subsequent history he tells Ianthe is both a reworking of the Biblical insistence that the earth begins with power and an account of sensual creation in Book VI of *Paradise Lost* where the touch of power is inscribed as a source of sensual pleasure, giving birth to greenery and habitable spaces.[216] Yet Ahasuerus's account of himself as standing with "stubborn and unalterable will" is indicative of a manner of turning away from "epic" elements, returning to a mode of perception proper to the pastoral simile, where likeness itself begins to annihilate the difference between an expression of the "will," and the utter dependency of the expression of the *will* on an unwavering investment in the possibility of sovereign will :

> 'Thus have I stood, -through a wild waste of years
> Struggling with whirlwinds of mad agony,
> Yet peaceful, and serene, and self-enshrined,
> Mocking my powerless tyrant's horrible curse
> With stubborn and unalterable will,
> Even as a giant oak, which heaven's fierce flame
> Had scathèd in the wilderness, to stand
> A monument of fadeless ruin there;
> Yet peacefully and movelessly it braves

[216] *Paradise Lost.* VIII. 513-60

The midnight conflict of the wintry storm,
As in the sunlight's calm it spreads
Its worn and withered arms on high
To meet the quiet of a summer's noon (VII. 254-66).

Caught between self-signifying martyrdom and his transformation into a monument *to* power, Ahasuerus risks becoming, as Stuart Curran puts it, a "parody of the central imaginative metaphor of the poem, manacling him to an unending struggle with chimeras of his own creation."[217] Yet our view of Ahaseurus here is also external and comparative, and as Shelley suggests, prone to developing surprising temporal vectors. What begins to emerge, alternatively, is the *Lucretian* "clinamen": the strange convergence of qualities and temporalities that the simile enables. Ahasuerus, "self-enshrined" like the "unbounded world" of the smallest being, perceives a change within the *assertion* of his own plight, where the pastoral image of "worn and withered arms on high" marks the passage of power.

Utopian Similitudes

Conjuring up Shelley's final, utopian movement depends upon coming to *perceive what is "habitable,"* as residing, not in the material substance that power mobilizes, but in the "poetntials" its "passing" generates. If both scientific discovery and imperialist conquest both makes the earth more accessible, it also the figure of the "habitable earth" that depends on gathering, as Alvey puts it, "not yet habitable"(Alvey 39), poised between past and future, that are in turn joined by figures of, that join to comprise a "present." The *dependency* on existing descriptions that appear to *assert their utopian form of* "life" and the *response* at which Shelley arrives:

[217] Curran, Stuart. Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision. San Marino, Calif: Huntington Library, 1975. 21.

> The habitable earth is full of bliss;
> Those wastes of frozen billows that were hurled
> By everlasting snow-storms round the poles,
> Where matter dared not vegetate or live,
> But ceaseless frost round the vast solitude
> Bound its broad zone of stillness, are unloosed;
> And fragrant zephyrs there from spicy isles
> Ruffle the placid ocean-deep, that rolls
> Its broad, bright surges to the sloping sand,
> Whose roar is wakened into echoings sweet
> To murmur through the heaven-breathing groves
> And melodize with man's blest nature there (VII. 58-69).

In his "Notes" to *Queen Mab*, Shelley argues that the geological discoveries have demonstrated that climatic changes will correct the Earth's tilt, transforming the frozen poles into temperate climes. Kenneth Cameron observes that Shelley draws on nineteenth century science that he finds aesthetic appealing, including the "tilt" of the earth that could be corrected through the necessitarian course of history.[218] The context Shelley's circulating, breathing earth are the trade routes of the British Empire that are beginning to establish London as the epicenter of the world, but that as we have seen, stifle and wither by attempting to hypostasize a hiearchical topography, but this hold is "unloosed," in the kinetic mutability that inheres in "the deep murmuring stream of passing things"(IX. 32). Thinking energies "bound" zones of stillness figures the "present" of the earth *as poised* upon astronomical, geological and ecological "change." The Earth itself is figured as a poetic medium, "wakened to echoings sweet." Shelley thinks temporally with the suggestiveness of an earth seemingly shaped by imperial conquest but in the very compulsion to *give* shape, sensually awakens the recalcitrant histories in scientific insights implicate *Britain's imperial travelers* who become "ecological" in spite of themselves.

[218] Cameron, Kenneth Neill. *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical.* New York: Macmillan, 1950.

The utopian transformations in the final cantos of the poem are not merely *formal* transformations but I think, attempts to *mark the accessibility of "forms"* to the sense of gathering "hosts" that itself generates : "O Happy Earth! reality of Heaven!/To which those restless souls that ceaselessly /Throng through the human universe, aspire; /Thou consummation of all mortal hope!"(IX, 1-4). In the address to "O Happy Earth!" would appear to affirm its arrival, yet in the subsequent lines, Shelley appears to re-orient the "reality of Heaven," it is not what is *imposed as the* point of anticipated eschatological arrival after suffering but rendered both effervescent and accessible as the more diffuse, seemingly anarchic "consummation" of "hope!" itself becoming a composite figure for "throng[ing]" souls. Echoed and revised in in *Laon and Cythna*, "hope" becomes a powerful metonym for the soul and the political power of the masses (When round pure hearts, a host of hopes assemble,/The Snake and Eagle meet—the world's foundations tremble!).[219] Yet if "hope" is awakened, it is nevertheless *dependent on* and likens to other "kindred souls," based on a passing *likeness.* *Queen Mab* displaces the image of commerce with its reverse, a power that brings "health" and the "flame/ of consentatneous love." As an indirect response to the "hungry mouths" of Thomas Malthus's concerns about space at "Nature's Table," of "myriads" and the uncontrollable moral problem of sexuality, Shelley offers the bold image of "myraids, who grow beneath" the "fertile bosom of the earth" and "reward[s]" the earth with "pure perfectness" (VII. 107-23). merging with nature itself with the "matron grace" and "ever-verdant" and "ever ripe" fruits.

[219] *Laon and Cythna* (XXXIII. 295-6).

CODA: WHEN DOES AN ECOSYSTEM BECOME AN ENVIRONMENT?

I began the project by taking seriously the environmentalist call to "inhabit" the difficult "space of critique and action," by reassessing our models of what *constitutes action* and how it becomes thinkable, appraising the benefits of an ecological thinking that attunes us to the autobiographical, lyric, and pedagogical dimension of natural things that have typically made the natural world fleeting and effervescently "present" in surprising ways. Even as I write, environmental protests and movements gain momentum from the discouraging findings of climate studies giving us shrinking time frame. While the horizon of the catastrophic event, contoured by dystopian fictions and meditations on terminality from writers like Bill McKibben, Roy Scranton, continue to motivate the public to action, such a preoccupation with life and death sees the revival of myths of the bond between land and people in "green nationalist" movements in Europe and the US. Without dismissing legitimate and pressing concerns about the future, my project aims to the flexibility, accessibility and freedom offered by an alternative, Romantic perspective that *accentuates* what *happened* and our ongoing, shifting investments in a past that remains in dispute within the very practice of elaborating an environment. Such a movement would distill minute histories of what is uncertain or only provisionally registered. Because ecological problems address us as impossibly daunting in their scope, the absorption with scaling up, with organized collective action, and with abstract models of possibility, bind us increasingly to energy-intensive, potentially-destructive technological infrastructures, while conferring a pervasive sense of powerlessness.

For each of the authors in this project, "ecological" thinking, by which relation to an environment, Hutton and Shelley, the authors that bookend this project demonstrate that the *minute, the perceptual,* matter not *less* but more when contemplating the possibility of a

"planetary" fate, urging us to attend to how a "planet," a system or a figure, is constituted. James Hutton's *theoretical system* becomes a manner, not of imposing or subsuming the world in a system, but of *enacting* a mineral pedagogy. Tracing a system does not involve aligning design *with revelation* but as what quietly dislodges it, renders the earth malleable to secular histories of "man" contingent upon "*perceptions"* that return to questions of legibility. The middle chapters on Wordsworth and Rousseau demonstrate, how describing, attuning to, or otherwise thinking about the environment is inextricably bound up with a history struggling to make itself accessible. Wordsworth attunes us to the "lyrical" dimension of ecological experience, beholden, not to a scientific structure of representation that has already become intuitive to our historical understanding of modernity, an understanding that we call upon to reiterate and reconstruct our *experience* of environmentality, but to a process of becoming "uncertain," of finding the familiar figures or the redundant repetitions unrecognizable resonances. Attending to these reconstitute an ecological perspective that simultaneously, insistently delineates a natural environment while underscoring its composition as contingent histories, engaged in *grappling* with "actions" through their continuous figural impact. Rousseau asks, in his final autobiographical work the *Reveries*, what does it mean for "natural man" to become historical? Bound up with the "social" effects, knowing that the details of his life invite pathologizing (not least of which by himself), Rousseau does not refute but embraces the intensities expressed as what he "would have wanted," a formulation that also revives with vigor the freedoms of Jean-Jacques, his inclinations, whims and tendencies, and *with it,* an emancipatory, palpable *de-animation of our* often overdetermining investments in universalizing social conditions.

Accompanying this dissertation have been many recent thinkers who have attempted to return, provisionally, some remaining degree of ease and access to figures of the natural world

still possible thinking is dominated by the "systemic" or the structural, among them Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Roland Barthes, and Luce Irigaray. This project has been an attempt to remain with *our capacity* to think, like Wordsworth and Shelley in terms of the "familiar" and the "planetary" in ways that become speculative and poetic, and to contend that cybernetic access, even when subtended by technology, appears to attune us more to internal *displacements, reflections upon uncertainties,* than returning us to an outward-oriented understanding of controllable systemic interactions. Yet instead of condemning reflective uncertainties as "inward" turns, a Romantic ecocriticism, I propose, would see these sites where "theory," be it ecological sustainability or political critique, as sites where questions of access, of empirical engagements, are still in question in a fruitful way. Instead of expressing the "stakes" of environmentalism purely in terms of "humans" who require ever-larger horizons of activity to survive, a task that itself, binds us to epistemic practices of , what would it mean to *think environmentally* in terms of *histories of selves they reconstitute?* Histories that *implicate* us but also *free us* to perceive, acting, and reacting environments? I conclude, then, with Kate Soper's observation that the uniqueness of the human lies not in any positive quality but that we are "underdetermined" in respect of the forms of our "satisfaction, pleasure and fulfillment." Though Soper invests in "opportunities of sensual experience denied by frenetic travel and work routines," the "form" of sensual experience resides in what current experience insists upon as empty, "experiences" of art that promote "eco-friendly idling, loitering, sky-gazing, and conviviality," that may appear empty but may mark experiences of ecological changes already under way.[220]

[220] Soper, Kate. 'The Humanism in Posthumanism', Comparative Critical Studies 9 (2012): 365-78.

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