

RUIN, MEMORY, AND THE SOCIAL BODY IN AUGUSTAN LITERATURE

RUIN, MEMORY, AND THE SOCIAL BODY IN AUGUSTAN LITERATURE

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Ph.D.

McMaster University

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1998)
(English)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Ruin, Memory, and the Social Body in Augustan Literature

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SUPERVISOR: Dr. Peter Walmsley

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 317

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the ground of, and practices of self-reflexivity behind, the often polemical contemporary debates that surround research practices and methodology in humanities and social sciences historiography. I focus on the unexamined reciprocity between conceptions of history and the linguistic and imagistic practices of remembering that affect and produce historiography in the eighteenth century: despite the identity of their epistemological foundation, in the long eighteenth century, “history” and “memory” begin to function as diverging truth-claims. By the end of the seventeenth century, John Locke’s well-known articulation of *tabula rasa*--itself a divergence from the remarkably stable medieval and renaissance conceptions of memory as “storehouse” and *tabula rasa*--signals an epistemological shift in forms of objectivity and, consequently, the subject’s experiences of her/his interiority.

I analyse aspects of the effects of this emerging epistemology on eighteenth-century thinkers’ reconstructions of the “social body.” Across a number of authors’ works and forms of representation--William Congreve’s drama, Mary Wollstonecraft’s political argumentation, picturesque theory and representation of nature, Locke, Hume, and Joseph Priestly’s philosophical debates, and William Blake and Laurence Sterne’s literary works--I attempt to trace significant shifts in the relation of “memory” and “history.” Throughout the chapters I focus on the relation of linguistic strategies of representation to shifts in various kinds of social and personal formations: from gender roles and political or cultural forms, to interpretations of causality, agency, and avenues for social change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Peter Walmsley, whose unwavering support and guidance helped to create and sustain the sense of this project as one of mutual discovery and exploration. Secondly, I would like to thank Sylvia Bowerbank and Richard Morton for their comments, suggestions, and interest in my work. Thirdly, I thank Apa and Baba Ahmad and my parents for their long-suffering patience and interest. Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank Sabeena Ahmad, without whose encouragement, patience and impatience, care, and support this work would never have been written. In many ways, this project is a small measure of her belief in me.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction; or, Figures and Figuring Out Memories that are the Past

“What, then, is time?” St. Augustine asks in book eleven of *Confessions*. “We certainly understand what is meant by the word both when we use it ourselves and when we hear it used by others”; however, Augustine’s remarks are as much a confessional of his thought as an autobiography of his life, and shortly he ruefully admits, “I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled” (14: 17). As the profusion of historical and anti-historical theses, the proliferation of largely unproductive clashes between “theorists” and “traditionalists”¹ make clear, we, too, do not know how to tell one another what time is. This “confusion” about the logic and mechanics of time naturally extends to its two key signifiers, “history” and “memory,” both of which have received an unprecedented amount of critical attention in recent years. If Augustine was baffled by time he was not confused about history; for him, “history” was the unthought of the human mind, the signifier beyond his control if not quite beyond his interest. In attempting to separate past, present, and future in book

¹ In their introduction to *New Eighteenth Century*, Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown refer to the polarized if imprecise practices signified by these terms. Neither “theory” nor “traditional” remains operative if we analyse the practices of scholarship that subtend their “opposition.” See pp. 1-3.

eleven of the *Confessions*, Augustine makes memory an intuition of the past in the present, and history and memory become curiously imbricated in this notion of the present. As Paul Ricoeur states in his monumental study *Time and Narrative*, through this relocating of “the past” Augustine “will first appear to turn his back on this certainty that it is the past and the future that we measure [in the concept of time]. Later, by placing the past and the future within the present, by bringing in memory and expectation, he will be able to rescue this initial certainty from its apparent disaster by transferring onto expectation and onto memory the idea of a long future and a long past” (6). But in Augustine’s reading of time there is already a movement away from Aristotle’s reading of time and memory. Aristotle would interpret memory as a combination of the construction and reflection of time; as Aristotle says, “whenever the movement of the thing and the movement of time are engendered simultaneously, then one is at work in memory” (712).

Aristotle’s distinction of an active and passive component in memory is no simple separation of the mind’s capability to posit or to receive a reality external to it. In a critical gesture that would be repeated in varying ways across the tradition of philosophy, Aristotle attempts to separate active from passive memory by drawing a distinction between “remembering” as a passive component of memory and “recollecting” as the active form or operation of memory. Richard Sorabji notes that Aristotle’s distinction between the two is difficult to support, and is undermined by the voices of the verbs he uses. “To remember” is not passive but active in form; in contrast, “recollection,” purportedly the active search for particular images, is passive in form (*Aristotle on*

Memory 35). Regardless of the epistemological success of this distinction as a categorical determination, its importance for Aristotle's subsequent chain of reasoning is clear, for on the basis of this preliminary distinction Aristotle privileges "recollection" over "remembering," active over passive memory. "The persons who possess a retentive memory are not identical with those who excel in power of recollection" (*Complete Works* 714). The slow-witted are often better at "remembering" while the quick-witted and better learners are better at "recollection." But in both its operations of remembering and recollection Aristotle will claim that memory "is neither perception nor conception, but a state or affection of one of these conditioned by lapse of time" (714); thus, the stronger exercise of memory will not be perception (sensory reception) or conception (cognitive projection or combinatory assimilation of memory contents); instead, it will merely carry the stronger trace of perception or intellectual activity. While I will return to ambiguities in Aristotle's example of recollection in chapter one, for our present purposes his distinctions between active and passive memory, and further, between memory on the one hand, and perception and conception, on the other, is crucial. For Aristotle, memory is always, to a greater or lesser degree, an active operation in the sense that both "remembering" and "recollection" possess the trace of cognition; similarly, even the activity surrounding the initial process of imprinting retains some element of passive and active world-construction. Borrowing the metaphor which also appears in Plato's *Theatetus*, Aristotle outlines the physicality of memory's functioning, a scene to which both Descartes and Locke will later return:

The process of movement stamps in, as it were, a sort of impression of the percept, just as persons do who make an impression with a seal. This explains why, in those who are strongly moved owing to passion, or time of life, no memory is formed; just as no impression would be formed if the movement of the seal were to impinge on running water; while there are others in whom, owing to the receiving surface, the requisite impression is not implanted at all. Hence both very young and very old persons are defective in memory; they are in a state of flux. . Similarly, both those who are too quick and those who are too slow have bad memories. The former are too moist, the latter too hard, so that in the case of the former the image does not remain in the soul, while on the latter it is not imprinted at all. (715)

This metaphor engenders a statement that has important ramifications for understanding the significance of memory in Locke's philosophy of sensual perception, for while Aristotle will note that "without an image thinking is impossible" (714) he will later claim that "memory belongs incidentally to the faculty of thought, and essentially it belongs to the primary faculty of sense-perception" (715). This is a logical extension of his earlier inconclusive assertion that an act of memory is in itself neither a perception nor a conception but is animated by some combinatory trace of these. Already in Aristotle, for whom processes of memory are an active apperception, the type of construction that takes place in memory is carefully controlled, such that in its very activity, memory is largely a reflection, rather than a construction, of the world perceived. The objectivity of time, the existence of time as outside human construction is implicitly at stake, and implicitly defended. Naturally, as it were, this explication of memory also structures a particular relation of individual perceiving agent to an external confluence of objects perceived. The

mediatory site for this relation, even if largely a site of reception, or more precisely in Aristotelian terms, even if largely passive in its positing of the external which it receives, is memory. Memory is the organ upon which time registers, not in which time is constructed. In order to maintain this hard-won boundary Aristotle will contend repeatedly that memory is a reflection of the past, since one does not remember “the present”:

memory relates to what is past. No one would say that he remembers what is present, when it is present. . .there is no such thing as memory of the present while present; for the present is object only of perception, and the future, of expectation, but the object of memory is the past. . .memory is a function. . .of the primary faculty of sense-perception, i.e., of that faculty whereby we perceive time. (714-15, 716)

If this is the mechanism whereby memory presents the past, the remembering consciousness always re-presents to itself some *thing* whose ontological status is beyond question, since in its pastness it can be said to have existed precisely because time has the character of “having been perceived” as a non-presence in and for the present. That is, if a memory is not present it is “no longer present”--the thing remembered has the quality of having *once been present* to the faculty of memory precisely in its having-been perceived. Thus, it is not merely some content of consciousness that is remembered in memory, but time itself as a kind of manifold or by-product of memory’s passive sensory imprint of a past presentness. In making “presentness” a thing of the past (since the condition of its visibility is that it must take place in memory since one cannot remember the present) Aristotle makes memory the very ground of what appears to us the condition of history.

Clearly, for Aristotle it is not “history” that accomplishes a knowledge of the past, but memory.

Augustine deals with this difficult logic in a different if no less spectacular manner.

In contrast to Aristotle’s placement of time as the sedimented object in memory, Augustine’s rumination on time proceeds in the expectation that he can escape this “present” he has constructed for *distentio*, for the aporia he finds in making the “past” present. Whether or not the paradox of time is a feasible question (i.e., can be solved in human thought), the present from which Augustinian memory (and, for us, history) constructs the past and future is merely the *measurement*, and not the *creation*, of time, for in contrast to Aristotle, Augustine sets “time” into the framing context of eternity.² If “time” as perceived in memory is a human construction in the present, that activity in Augustine’s logistics of memory is always merely an approximation of the eternal. For this reason, the problem of objectivity and subjectivity in practices of remembering is largely a moot point for St. Augustine, and the implied degree of objectivity or subjectivity

² For this reason, too, Ricoeur will explicitly “rescue” the ambiguities of Augustine’s rumination on time from its framing in and by eternity; as Ricoeur words it, “to isolate the analysis of time from this meditation [on the relations between eternity and time] is to do violence to the text, in a way that is not wholly justified” (*Time and Narrative* 5). Augustine’s text does justify this manoeuvre to some extent, since when it is concerned with time, it “no longer refers to eternity except to more strongly emphasize the ontological deficiency characteristic of human time and to wrestle directly with the aporias afflicting the conception of time as such” (5). For my own purposes of tracking in brief the central philosophical movements through which the inter-relations of time, objectivity, subjectivity, sensory perception, and thought shift within the dominant metaphors of memory, I must retain Augustine’s framing of time with/in eternity, since it is against this border that the subjectivity inherent in the perception of time remains, for him, a relatively unimportant avenue of inquiry.

in the “perception” or “conception” of time is absent from the *Confessions*.

But this distinction between subjective and objective perception is a distinct problem for “modernity.” From the late seventeenth century to the present, the problem of time has become a distinctly social one, not just for personal understanding but for social direction. We clearly are living no more in St. Augustine’s “time.” In postmodernity the conundrum of memory’s functioning has been “managed,” and continues to be managed, in the fraught imposition of a separation between “history” and “memory,” in a discursive context that in its abjection of “history” now appears to “collapse” the distinction between the two, but which, in Aristotle and Augustine, appears already to have been the domain of a carefully regulated conception of memory’s functioning. In postmodernity’s relocating to “history” what was once memory’s passive-constructive function of reflecting a past once perceived, the entire problem Aristotle and Augustine must stage in the operation of memory becomes a relatively simple manner of abjecting “history” from operations of remembering; once this is accomplished, all operations can take place under the sign of a memory that has been emptied of its merely reflective designation. But memory, as Aristotle and Augustine’s analyses make clear, has its “history” as well, a past whose return seems immanent. A brief look at the postmodern context for interpreting “memory” and “history” in this way can re-situate a reading of memory in the eighteenth-century, the horizon in which memory appears a legacy for the “future” we have come to inhabit.

In the simplest of more recent designations, “history” has signified an operation of

detachment or a disinterestedness of the subject from its objects of understanding; in contrast, “memory” has tended to signify an operation of interestedness, of subjective organization and participation, in the object. In perhaps the most recent and exhaustive attempt to valorize memory, the seven volume *Les Lieux du Mémoire*, Pierre Nora accentuates the active principle of construction as memory: “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past” (“Between Memory and History” 8). But as the monumentality of the effort to revivify memory, and in so doing, to expunge “history” conceived as monolithic logos from its sphere of operations suggests, this simple designation has come under intense scrutiny in recent criticism, and with it, the validity-claims maintaining the separation between the “objectivity” of history and the “subjectivity” of memory. As Peter Burke contends, “neither memory nor history seem objective anymore” (“History as Social Memory” 98). This “recent” collapsing of the two long-“naturalized” spheres is located as the product of postmodern³ theoretical investigation, which has extended across a wide

³ In using the term “postmodern,” I am referring to a currently widely deployed series of basic assumptions about subjectivity, language, and agency. Thus, for the purposes of this introduction I include structuralist and post-structuralist theories and reading strategies. For a wide range of interpretations of “postmodern” see Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism*, esp. 59-62; Jean-François Lyotard, “Note on the Meaning of ‘Post-’,” “An Answer to the Question, What is the Postmodern?,” and *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*; Ihab Hassan, “Toward a Concept of Postmodernism”; Charles Altieri, “Postmodernism: A Question of Definition”; Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition*, esp. 52-87; Julia Kristeva, “Postmodernism?”; Paolo Portoghesi, *Postmodern*; Richard Rorty, “Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism”; Ernesto Laclau, “Politics and the Limits of Modernity”; Boyne, R. and A. Rattansi, eds. *Postmodernism and Society*; Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism”; Rey Chow, “Reading Mandarin Ducks and

range of humanities and social sciences disciplines, given rise to interdisciplinary interpretative schema, and produced sometimes disabling frissons, frictions, and silences within these fields of study. As in the oppositional structure that grounds Nora's study of history and memory, the localized knowledge accessible in "memory," with its potential to disable the fiction of chronological time constitutive of "history," now tends to be valorized over its "opposite" functions in "history." Scholars tend to speak of this movement as part of a legitimation crisis in humanities and social sciences research, a profound questioning of enlightenment values, particularly of the founding assumptions of "reason." In *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz succinctly lists the postmodern coordinates of this "crisis." First, she outlines the critical assumptions in various systems of contemporary knowledges against which "the crisis" articulates itself. In a shortened version of Grosz's presentation these are: 1. "the underlying presumption in the humanities and social sciences that reason and knowledges based upon it are *methodologically appropriate* to their object of investigation, the human subject"; 2. "a presumption about the boundaries, scope, and limits of knowledges, in other words, their disciplinary organization"; 3. presumptions about validity claims, or, as Grosz words it, disciplinary observances of "criteria of truth and validity by which such knowledges are judged valid and/or true"; 4. belief in the "atemporal and transgeographic value and validity of knowledges by its most uncritical supporters"; 5. "Knowledge is

Butterflies: A Response to the 'Postmodern' Condition"; Simon During, "Postmodernism or Post-Colonialism Today"; and Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity."

considered *perspectiveless*” (27-8). Grosz then counters this list of outmoded methodological assumptions with corresponding shifts in contemporary thought:

1. “There is a notable breakdown of confidence in modes of “objectivist” inquiry. . .”
2. The positivist aspiration of humanities and social sciences research (those based on “a natural science model of research”) “reduces its object--humanity--to the status of measurable object: behavioral psychology, statistical sociology, and positivist historiography” among these;
3. Throughout humanities and social sciences disciplines there is an increasing “recognition of the impossibility of reason’s self knowledge”;
4. “Knowledges lack the means to understand their own self-development as knowledges”;
5. “Because of the elision of the presumed subject of knowledge and the (historical) processes of production of knowledges, prevailing intellectual paradigms face a crisis of perspectivism.”
6. Finally, “the crisis of reason consists in the impossibility of rationally deciding between competing methods and paradigms produced from different positions” (29-30).

In “Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail,” Alan Liu identifies the aesthetics of style which the observance of these assumptions produce in their practical application. One of the most promising of these research “methodologies” for literary scholarship, new historicism, becomes a politics of detailism in its inability to support a founding epistemological gesture. Liu details this emerging paradigm:

We live in an age of “detailism” characterized by the “pervasive valorization of the minute, the partial, and the marginal,” Naomi Shor says in her intriguing *Reading in Detail*, a study of the genealogy of detailism leading up to modernist and post-structuralist aesthetics [3]. High cultural criticism is an aesthetics--and much more--of specifically postmodern detailism. Or to name the method’s related leading concepts: it is particularism, localism, regionalism, relative autonomism, incommensurabilism, accidentalism (or contingency), anecdotalism, historicism. .

.“All these,” we may say in words borrowed from Clifford Geertz’s *Local Knowledge*, “are products of a certain cast of thought, one rather entranced with the diversity of things.” Or as Richard Rorty sums it up, “All that can be done to explicate ‘truth,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘morality,’ ‘virtue’ is to refer us back to the concrete details of the culture in which these terms grew up” [*Consequences* 173]. And most succinctly, that unofficial motto repeated several times in Jerome McGann’s *Social Values and Poetic Acts*: “I make for myself a picture of great detail.” [7, 122, 124] (“Local Transcendence” 78).

With Grosz and Liu in mind we might add one more feature of “new criticism.” In the form of their comments, they assert another of the critical commonplaces of “new criticism,” one which requires a seemingly incessant strategy of compilation. In the absence of “reason” repetition becomes the ultimate principle for establishing the status of evidentiary presentation, or in detailing critical positions, a practice which often “requires” lists of positions and/or oppositions. These poetics in the arrangement of knowledge are also an attempt to defer or eradicate the chronological and causal enchainment of the material elements of the past in narrative, the form most conducive to “history.” Indeed, not only new historicism, but also post-Marxism, deconstruction, post-structuralism, and the varied approaches which constitute feminism stake their research methodologies and critical strategies within the logistics of Grosz’s last six points and Liu’s critical aesthetic. A paradoxical strategy emerges: marking time as always already “out of joint,” postmodern criticism does so in order to put enlightenment assumptions to rest--in order, that is, to move “the present” production of culture and society beyond the enlightenment’s scope of cultural influence, in the effort to speak of the enlightenment as past in a context of critique in which the past no longer remains securely divorced from

the present, since memory establishes a “perpetual bond” with the past. The general (and often, generalized) validity-claim produced as the “logical” outcome of this critical position is that history as an epistemological determination and as a determination of the epistemological is being effaced, if not altogether eradicated, in the imploding of its central (enlightenment) categories. Thus, within these polemics “history” becomes one of the prime signifiers in which the battle over contesting research methodologies is carried out; curiously, “history” becomes increasingly more narrow in its definition and scope since it becomes foremost a signifier of the ideological position of a critique rather than an epistemological determination within that critique. History, that is, has come to signify a teleological project which recapitulates enlightenment assumptions about the universality of all knowledges, the appropriateness of standards of objectivity and reason that produce that history, and the naturalness of subject positions in networks of practices that subtend that conception of “history.” Hegel becomes the substantiating figure for this version of “History,” a figure which the present must exorcise from its (active) past. In this effort, history is alternatively an ontological or linguistic product, an existential or a quasi-mechanical meaning-effect of language, but in any of these related interpretations it is figured as no more than a signifier for its own emptying-out by critical assumptions and accompanying analytical practices suspicious of teleological validation in any form. But as I will attempt to demonstrate, the privileging of “memory” that results from delimiting the range of the sign “history” tends to obscure the reciprocity of formation that inheres in the two terms, and oversimplifies other modes of interaction between history and memory.

If this assumption has any validity, we need to re-consider eighteenth-century modes of interpreting relations of subjective agency, memory, and history, particularly in light of John Sitter's assertion that Augustans believed that "memory, not the imagination, is the means to ideal truth" (*Literary Lonliness* 167). Some of the work of revising interpretative approaches is already being done in eighteenth-century scholarship, although, as John Bender contends, eighteenth-century critics have in general resisted "theorizing" away the basic assumptions of enlightenment interpretative codes, perhaps preferring an explicit espousal of enlightenment assumptions to an implicit recapitulation of them. Felicity Nussbaum identifies the tension between "historical research" and criticism of Enlightenment categories: the ground of our arguments most often appears from the "archival records and material artifacts of the period" we employ to "assert the authenticity and historicity of our claims" ("Politics of Difference" 376-77). But as Bender notes, this purchase on the object of contemplation has not been gained without a certain critical price. In his contribution to *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, Bender remarks that until recent attempts at revision, Anglo-American critical analysis of eighteenth-century literature "fundamentally reproduced Enlightenment assumptions," thereby reproducing in its objective of critical engagement the object(s) under scrutiny. If a theory of knowledge is to escape tautology, Bender contends, "it must conserve its own systems of reference and its own contemporaneity" (79). Only through such reading of the present can the critical act yield a "knowledge produced by critical analysis" rather than produce a

“recapitulation” of prior assumptions (79). Through categories of analysis made available by postmodern strategies of inquiry, Nussbaum specifies the dangers of ignoring postmodern thought altogether: if as scholars we refuse the process of exploring “conjunctions and dissonances. . .we also risk replicating the Enlightenment’s racism, sexism, and classism” (“Politics” 385-86). Clearly, Bender and Nussbaum’s remarks take place within the horizon of the postmodern assumptions I identified with reference to Grosz and Liu.

Reading Nussbaum and Bender’s remarks through Aristotle’s notion of memory, we can distinguish in what ways their related notions of “historical” research participates in the postmodern “collapse” of history and memory. If time in the eighteenth century becomes a distinctly social issue, increasingly falling within the domain of human intentionality if not always within individual agency (as my reading across the century from Congreve to Wollstonecraft will show), then reading and adjudicating the signs of time--“history” and “memory”--from the eighteenth century onwards becomes a practice of historicizing the present. In his remarks on the emergence of the novel in the eighteenth century, J. Paul Hunter implies that in its “contemporaneity,” this historicizing of the present is a structural feature of “the novel,” one of the key generic forms to have emerged in and from the eighteenth century: “Unlike literary forms that feature an appeal to the exotic and the far-away in place and time, novels are fundamentally stories of now, or stories about events in a relevant past, one that has culminated in a now, a moment poised in instability and change” (*Before Novels* 23). In contradistinction to Aristotle,

postmodern notions of the “historicity” of all interpretation suggest that constructing history or histories must begin, as Bender strongly suggests, in the act of reading the present through memory, that the present is something *to be remembered*. Thus, in its importance as a critical practice, postmodern “memory” seems to have amalgamated aspects of Aristotelian and Augustinian conceptions of memory as its mode of critical inquiry: if the past must be remembered within the present, as Augustine contends, the postmodern jettisoning of “history” does not allow that act to be grounded in an authority outside of subjectivist interpretation (which Augustine’s framing of remembered time in eternity accomplishes). Similarly, if postmodern memory removes the active/passive construct in Aristotelian memory in a practice of radical relocation--an effort of expunging from memory its passive, reflective component by allocating this function to a debased “history”--it thereby privileges the act of conception, and so both inverts within memory and abjects from it Aristotle’s ultimate framing of the operations of memory as a passive mode of reception. At the same time, memory retains its subjective character, which sets the epistemological limit of its constructive propensity in particular ways. Whatever referent of the text appears in the act of reading and writing has an arbitrary designation since memory is foremost an operation of subjective construction in and of the present. In my readings of eighteenth-century texts, it is precisely the appearance of the conditions for such constructions of memory that I wish to explore.

In the context of eighteenth-century re-positionings of operations of remembering, postmodern constructions of memory appear a distinct legacy of an “enlightenment” far

less naive than is commonly recognized. As in the case of a delimited “history,” a simplified enlightenment becomes the ground for expulsing its naive emancipatory values and teleological textual economies in and from the present.⁴ This “measurement” of a difference between past and present is the very ground in which the present is constructed. For as the postmodern re-conceptualizing of Aristotelian and Augustinian externalities of memory make clear, this practice of memory must construct a critical, self-reflexive distance *within* the present in order to begin to speak a past. In paragraph sixteen of “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin alludes to this process in his discussion of historical materialism, when he notes that the time such a critique constructs “cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop” (262)--the “stop” granted by the clearing of an aesthetic distance within the present. It is this notion that “defines the present in which he himself [the historical materialist] is writing history”; but in the absence of “history,” it is memory that performs this operation, as it does in Augustine’s *Confessions*, with the following difference: as Benjamin suggests in paragraph one of “Theses,” the teleological grounding of the text is disallowed. But it survives this expulsion of a rigidly objectified “history”: “historical materialism. . . can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we all know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight” (253). As I will argue in chapter six, Wollstonecraft grasped this insight in her reading practice of the

⁴ As Nussbaum frames this problem, “postmodernism’s anti-Enlightenment sentiments. . . oversimplify the past in the interest of asserting its difference from the present” (“Politics” 381).

present and employed it in her writing practice to refashion a social memory in the present. Thus, from the eighteenth-century to postmodernity the present, too, is something that can and, indeed, *must* be remembered.

It has been difficult to establish this connection between “past” and “present” contexts of writing in eighteenth-century studies because, as Bender suggests, new historicism, feminism(s), and cultural materialism have provoked much hostility in that these textual and material practices have produced--at times demanded--a significant change of reference (81). In part, this hostility is produced by scholars labelled (somewhat problematically) “traditionalists,” thinkers who recognize that the homogenized “enlightenment” postmodernity would too quickly pass over constitutes a critically disabling blindness to significant aspects of its own founding assumptions. As Gayatri Spivak notes in the context of feminist struggle,

I think it is absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism, as it comes to terms with the universal--of classical German philosophy or the universal as the white upper-class male. . .etc. but strategically we cannot. Even as we talk about feminist practice, or privileging practice over theory, we are universalizing. (184)

Further, she recognizes, with Benjamin, that “the moment of essentializing, universalizing, saying yes to the onto-phenomenological question, is irreducible” (57).

This poses another problem for criticism: the dilemma of eroding away the very perspective between past and present that a critique accomplishes through its re-location in subjectivist theories of memory, since postmodern “memory” encounters the past in a

solipsistic mode of detachment. When the long-standing if often implicit Hegelian fiction of teleologically governed temporal progression, and the scholar's claim of immanence with the specificity and materiality of past ages (what Bender identifies as "positivist historicism" 79) amount to no more than a recapitulation of idealist assumptions inherent in the very establishment of any relation between past and present, between the object of study and the present act of analysis, then "history" and historiography threaten to collapse into ruin. Historical research become a series of analytical gesticulations without critical purpose--at best a collection of "anecdotes," as Bender employs the term, an enervation of the rhetorical power of a text in its provision of disinterested knowledge (89).

We have already seen one significant mechanism whereby postmodernity renders the teleological gesture invisible; "history," in fact, seems endlessly serviceable in this regard. And if Benjamin is suggesting, as I think he is, that the "teleological" gesture survives its expulsion (an insight to which Derrida, de Man, and a host of other postmodernist thinkers continually attest), then "historical" criticism that observes or, alternatively, ignores, the assumptions promulgated in postmodern thought seems caught in a double bind of self-reflexivity. On the one hand, if the critic respects the assumption that "detachment" is a teleological construction from within the present, "historical" research becomes a solipsistic gesture in which the methodology the critic adopts to grasp the "historical" object is revealed as itself the object s/he eventually does manage to hold. On the other hand, in an effort to maintain the ability to grasp the historical object, if the

critic ignores postmodern assumptions in order to eliminate a certain teleological naïveté that adheres to its founding claims, then the object the critic obtains is revealed, embarrassingly, to have been already in her/his hand.

But out of this double bind, (to borrow Hume's formulation) a "new scene" of historical projection might be made available: the analysis of different *applications* of "the teleological" in practices of writing. Thus, re-focussing critical attention not on its expulsion but on its stubborn survival in the present may allow the appearance of a different set of relations between "past" and "present," "enlightenment" and "postmodern" discourses, for criticism then attempts to understand the different *uses* to which the teleological gesture is put in and through practices of writing. If postmodernity constitutes its peculiar identity in the (failed) gesture of isolating from (within) itself teleological articulations, perhaps the eighteenth century constitutes and re-constitutes itself in the exploration of a secular rhetoric within the (failed or failing) teleological. In other words, both discursive fields can be understood as re-negotiating teleological effects in the (social) text. Thinking the relation between past and present in this way satisfies Bender's recommendation to observe well the contemporaneous exercises of knowledge; it also enables a considerably more enriched version of "the enlightenment," in which many enlightenment thinkers begin to appear, across a diverse range of often opposing interpretations, shrewdly aware of the uses of teleology as a political technology, as a means for re-directing the social sphere. What form might this historical research take?

If Bender is correct in his assessment that in eighteenth-century studies the

“institution” of criticism and the “object of study” are particularly congruent in relation to the more diffusive practices of collective Anglo-American literary study (86), it seems crucial, in an effort to sustain the very values such criticism purports to protect, to re-read simultaneously the constitution of “the eighteenth century” in predominant critical practices and the texts produced “in” the eighteenth century. This practice of reading must attempt to enact a reading guided by two interlocking if often internally conflicted aims of historical research: understanding the past entails reading that past through the critical context of the present; but the present critical apparatus must allow the historical texts and context its resistances to that methodology. In other words, in addition to the two inter-related projects of reading the past and the present contexts, the critic must recognize the necessity of working within a conceptual language that does not and perhaps should not equate one context with, or within, another. The critic must accept, and in fact, *attempt to preserve*, the difficulties inherent in the process of measuring the temporal and conceptual contiguities of “past” and “present” across concepts that are most often inadequate translations of the distinct interpretative assumptions or contextual divergences s/he would make visible across this divide. In this effort of preservation the critical reader hopes to avoid simply “conserving” her/his own ideological biases through the ruse of a renewed critical engagement; in this effort, perhaps some alternative version or aspects of history may appear as the difference across the language uses of two largely distinct lived realities. As Bender remarks at the close of his essay, the discourse that establishes a “new” ground of legitimacy can no longer claim disinterestedness; in such a

situation, self-reflexiveness toward a revised critical practice is bound to risk a capitulation to its own analysis of ruination. Another way to think this problem is to say that history as I am reconceptualizing the term is both the process of searching for, and the compulsion to distinguish among, competing forms of self-reflexivity.

With such tasks in mind, my own project of “historical” reading takes as its impetus Sandra Harding’s suggestive comment toward an alternative reading practice in “The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory.” Her re-direction of the problem of methodology is provocative: “[i]nstead of fidelity to the assumption that coherent theory is a desirable end in itself and the only reliable guide to action, we can take as our standard fidelity to *parameters* of dissonance” within and between enlightenment discourses (650).⁵ These “parameters of dissonance” seem to me self-evident across eighteenth-century discursive contexts, from the intense productivity of writers whose texts refuse the imposition of genre considerations, to the apparent “contradictions” in which many of them lived quite fruitful lives. In the historical text and context in which I find what appears a shared contradiction--a phenomena that seems, from present analytical, rational-deductive categories, an opposition in the social or political unconscious--I search that context or text for ways in which the “contradiction” is managed, elided, occluded or embraced in language. Such a reading strategy attempts to remain attentive to the assertion of competing teleological projects, and interprets this

⁵ See also her “Taking Responsibility” for an example of the application of this research methodology to reconstitute social studies and science paradigms.

phenomena of the eighteenth-century text not as a homogenized exercise of an illicitly obtained power, but as a particularized, intertextually-specific staging of a search for social direction; thus, while foregrounding the persuasiveness of teleological rhetoric, this approach allows the possibility that two or more competing versions of time within a single text signify more than a mark of that text's logical invalidation or capitulation to the teleological condition of *all* writing.

If this is true of the formation of eighteenth-century notions of writing, however, the eighteenth-century context in which the teleological affect appears differs considerably from postmodern interpretations of teleology. In the first instance, if I am arguing that eighteenth-century writers are by no means unaware of the political, social, and cultural power of teleological claims, they are by no means reticent in including such claims in their texts. In fact, if in a postmodern context the inclusion (necessary or not) of teleological or universalist claims is viewed with nearly visceral suspicion, the *absence* of teleological claims is viewed with an equally physical response in eighteenth-century receptions of certain texts (to which the unfortunate case of Hume's early reputation as a philosopher attests). Steven Zwicker's comments are suggestive: the "interlocking vocabularies" of political, linguistic, and religious beliefs were indicative of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers' recognition of a language that enjoyed a "wide ideological appeal: the defence of liberty, the rights of property, and religion by law established" (*Politics and Language* 10). But in this difference, a particular confusion arises: contrary to a wide-spread postmodern interpretative assumption, not all teleological claims are

alike; if they shared a similar need to make use of the “ideological” (although I prefer the less Marxist-inflected “teleological,” since I am suggesting that the writers of the period were consciously aware of their use of a certain stylistics of “contradiction”), the writers of the (late) seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries deployed the teleological that circulated in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century signifiatory practices in a variety of ways. In *Space, Time, and Perversion* Elizabeth Grosz notes that terms such as “essentialism,” “biologism,” “naturalism,” and “universalism” are, in contemporary criticism, “labels for danger zones or theoretical pitfalls”; but if “these terms seem unquestionably problematic” their status “as criteria of critical evaluation” is no longer as clear-cut as it might once have seemed (*Space* 49, 50). Grosz does not suggest that these terms should be denuded of their critical power; significantly, she offers them as a means to re-evaluate and re-direct certain critical projects in feminist(s) discourse. But to develop Grosz’s comments into a denaturalization of critical terms, in addition to the predominantly unitary meanings a critical apparatus makes visible in their applications, these signifiers have specificities of relations in the texts in which they are mobilized. With reference to the signifiers I evaluate in subsequent chapters, I would add to her cognates of teleological apparati such vexed terms as “context,” “individual,” “social world,” “causality,” “agency” and, of course, “history” and “memory.” In fact, in eighteenth-century texts, which often offer a bewildering array of rhetorical styles and genres within a “single” text, such linguistic disruptions of unitary meanings for key words seem constitutive of the reading process; the fixity in, or attempts to regulate the linguistic signification of, central terms in the

varying “genres” that constitute an eighteenth-century discursive field are continually destabilized by writing strategies that create juxtapositions of meaning which produce relocations of epistemological and ontological coordinates.

If it is important to mark the occurrence of these terms as well as other bulwarks of teleological reading practices in texts we encounter, it seems equally crucial, if far less often observed as a critical practice, to nuance their applications in those texts. As Spivak states, “let us become vigilant about our own [teleological] practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it. . .”

(“Criticism, Feminism” 184). This is tantamount to suggesting that there may well be more than one form of teleology out there, and more than one form of reading them. In the situation of contemporary critical practices, in which teleological meaning-effects now appear a structural irreducibility of writing, if the critiques of social direction we attempt to mount are to offer alternatives, we need to continue to define criteria by which self-reflexive choices can be made available. By returning to the circuitous transference of identity in “history” and “memory”--this time with reference to eighteenth-century texts and figures--I will suggest ways in which this reading strategy is particularly well suited to the “context” of the eighteenth century. In fact, the eighteenth century seems in many ways so resistant to the current production of critical fields of terminology that it demands a reciprocal interrogation of the very language through which it becomes sensible.

Understanding the eighteenth century entails producing an enabling frisson between two bodies of texts that serve their own organizational rubrics; it is not the melding of critical

apparati to texts that will produce a valid interpretation, but attentiveness to mutual effects of repulsion which trace the contours of this reading strategy's identification of possibilities--especially across signs whose associative potential appears inconsequential or entirely contingent. But in the formulation of this strategy, too, I follow the legacy of eighteenth-century practices of reading.

In eighteenth-century contexts, the movement between history and memory seems far less specific than postmodern categories seem to allow. The profusion of "diary" forms, the rise of the novel (as an imaginative history, a historical memory, a representation in equal parts "fanciful" and "historical"--from Behn's *Oroonoko* to Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker*), the projection of nostalgia into history, the "collapse" of history and memory in sensory perception--all of these phenomena among many other interesting imbrications of history and memory suggest that predominantly different criteria were available relations of history and memory. Hayden White has gone as far as to assert that, prior to the French Revolution, "historiography was conventionally regarded a literary art. . . a branch of rhetoric [whose] 'fictive' nature [was] generally recognized" ("Fictions of Factual Representation" 23-4). While I do not agree with White's assessment of historiography as "fictive" in eighteenth-century modes of representation, he does suggest that different criteria of validity are operative in eighteenth-century historiography. If we can find teleologically-based inferences throughout eighteenth-century texts, a certain economy of rhetorical justification that immediately raises our (post)modern critical suspicions, nowhere can we find the

teleological model of history abjected from postmodern practices of remembering. The eighteenth-century seems, throughout its production of an equally wide range of texts and genres, often explicitly in search of such a model, which is tantamount to claiming that the writers of the period were unsatisfied either with the status of historiography or the very conception of “progressive” teleologies. At mid-century Johnson lamented that England, “which has produced so many authors eminent for almost every other species of literary excellence, has been hitherto remarkably barren of historical genius. . .if we have failed in history, we can have failed only because history has not hitherto been diligently cultivated” (*Rambler* no. 122; 18 May 1751; in *Writings* IV 288-89). Historians of the eighteenth century do not appear unanxious progenitors of historical necessity. In “Lord Bolingbroke and Eighteenth-Century Historiography,” D.J. Womersley traces a continuity in the tension between “historiographic principles and historiographic practice. . . duplicated in English historical writing” from Bolingbroke to Hume and Gibbon (218). As the dominant writers of eighteenth-century historiography, Hume and Gibbon engage in a continual search for a historical method whose language would be adequate to its object.⁶ Hume begins writing his *History of England*, a re-reading of the Whig version of

⁶ In this effort, Hume and Gibbon were not alone: see Roger Schmidt’s “Roger North’s *Examen*: A Crisis in Historiography”; Peter Sabor’s “Horace Walpole as a Historian”; Eldon J. Eisenach’s “The Dimension of History in Bentham’s Theory of Law”; John A. Vance’s “Johnson and Hume: Of Like Historical Minds,” in which Vance asserts that “like Hume, Johnson understood the complexity and contradictory nature of historical causality” (250); and Philip Hicks’s “Bolingbroke, Clarendon, and the Role of the Classical Historian,” which traces the confusion in early eighteenth-century historiography to the rise in print culture and the changes that culture introduced into the methodology of classical historiography. The passing of the role

seventeenth-century British history, as a search for a language in which to articulate a “new Scene of Thought,” as he wrote of his philosophical endeavours in a 1734 letter to John Cheyne (*Letters* I, 13). If Hume wrote at the outset of the project that the “first Quality of an Historian is to be true and impartial” (*Letters* I, 210), and further, if in *Enquiry* he noted the “great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages” and identified history’s “chief use” as the discovery of “the constant and universal principles of human nature” (“Of Liberty and Necessity”), his *History* belies this universalizing frame in its materialist presentation of the conflict that produces the state.⁷ Similarly, Hume omitted “Of the Study of History” in the post-1760 editions of *Essays*. Combining the tone of the female conduct books with the theme of the primary advantages of acquiring a knowledge of history, “Study of History” is governed by the assumption that the study of history allows an objectivity that privileges the present vantage point over the past perplexity of judgement: “female readers” can “see all the human race, from the beginning of time, pass, as it were, in review before us, appearing in their true colours, without any of those disguises which, during their lifetime, so much perplexed the judgement of the beholders” (558, 560). Hume’s own historiographical

of the classical historian is interesting in the context of Hume’s acknowledgement of Clarendon as one of the sources for the passages in the first volume of *History*. Primarily critical of all other historians in the eighteenth century, Hume acknowledges Clarendon explicitly as the source for his representation of Charles’s trial and execution.

⁷ John J. Burke Jr. notes that Hume re-reads his own universalizing assertions. See “Hume’s *History of England*: Waking the English from a Dogmatic Slumber.”

method was far less disinterested than this comment in “Of History” would imply; in fact, his express interest, and interestedness, is in re-scripting the text of *political* history, as he made clear in a letter addressed to Adam Smith two years before the publication date of the first volume of *History*:

’Twas under James that the House of Commons began first to raise their Head, & then the Quarrel betwixt Privilege and Prerogative commenc’d. The Government no longer oppress by the enormous Authority of the Crown displayed its Genius; and the Factions, which then arose, having an Influence on our present Affairs, form the most curious, interesting, and instructive Part of our History. (*Letters* I, 168)

Rapin’s *Histoire d’Angleterre*, translated into English by Nicholas Tindal in 1728 was, arguably, one of the most widely read and influential of English histories in the eighteenth century before Hume’s *History*; in Hume’s denunciations of this work we can read an impatience not only with the existing state of historiography but also with references to a historical agency outside of human intervention. His letters during the period of writing volume one reveal his growing critique of Rapin’s “history” in both senses. In a January 1753 letter to John Clephane, Hume spoke of the absence of history in British histories:

“You know that there is no post of honour in the English Parnassus more vacant than that of History. Style, judgement, impartiality, care--everything is wanting to our historians; and even Rapin, during the latter period [1700s] is extremely deficient” (*Letters* I, 170).

Just six months later Hume would assert this same sentiment in much more forceful language: “the more I advance in my undertaking, the more I am convinced that the History of England has never yet been written, not only for style, which is notorious to all

the world, but also for matter; such is the ignorance and partiality of all our historians” (*Letters* I, 179). And Hume would add a note of personalized, moral disdain to professional condemnation, writing of his rival historian, “Rapin, whom I had esteem for, is totally despicable” (179). Hume’s version of the unfolding of British history is more one of a messy Nietzschean contestation of wills in time than an anticipation of a Hegelian, inexorable progression toward the self-identity of a historicized eternity, or the uncovering of a universalized humanity. Contesting the standard Whig interpretation of the historical necessity of Commons, Hume locks into a mutual opposition the bipartisan polemics of Whig and Tory telos. He argues that the House of Commons is the aggressor against which the king (James I) is forced to adopt an aggressive stance as counterbalance: if James was *agent provocateur*, he was so “by reason of the opposite doctrines, which began to be promulgated [in Commons] by the puritanical party” (*History* VI, 161). The political stance in his *History* is all the more remarkable given that in his essays (notably, “Of the Original Contract”) as well as his philosophy (his avowed scepticism) Hume scandalized his society and jeopardized his position as writer in his espousal of the constructedness of the social world by social contract (in Hume’s version, not necessarily a contract between equally “free” participants), rather than by ceding to royal or religious apodeictic authority. The undercurrent of Hume’s social and philosophical ambition notwithstanding, this is not the language of a historian nuancing a widely-shared teleological vision of Britain’s development; in fact, its very situatedness suggests that the “teleological” element of history is precisely what is both vacant and contestable. As we

shall see in chapter three, Sterne's use of Tristram to assert a markedly dialogical version of the social contract has strong affinities with Hume's multi-faceted social and historical project, but this affinity between Sterne and Hume underscores the contrast between Hume's *History*, which often seems an apologetics of royal position, and his philosophical scepticism--not what we might expect of a philosopher/historian constructing a teleologically-motivated project.

Another of the great historians of the eighteenth century, Edward Gibbon, occupies a subject position equally as conflicted as that of Hume, for Gibbon was by all accounts a conservative in politics and a radical in philosophy and religion. The six volumes of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* appear over the course of the latter years of the (French) enlightenment,⁸ appearing within the later blooming, or, in a more Gibbonsian spirit, the sudden and final flaring of enlightenment possibility between the American and French revolutions. Gibbon's entire text, predictably enough given the title of the work, figures history less as an inexorable movement toward an ideal than a shoring up against ruin. As J.G.A. Pocock recognizes, Gibbon's world-view is at best a hope for some principle of maintenance in the "progression" of time. As Pocock describes Gibbon's historical philosophy, "the virtue of commercial and cultivated man was never complete, his freedom and independence never devoid of corruption. *No theory of human progress*

⁸ The temporal span of a British "enlightenment" is difficult to ascertain, but the influence of French enlightenment ideals is clearly discernible in British cultural life at the time Gibbon is writing *Decline and Fall*.

could be constructed which did not carry the negative implication that progress was at the same time decay, that culture entailed some loss of freedom and virtue. . .” (“Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*” 292-3; italics added).⁹ As Gibbon wrote in the final volume of *Decline and Fall*, the entire work “described the triumph of barbarism and religion” (VII, 308-09). His scepticism, however, if it disparages “barbarism and religion” also measures more positive effects of these historical agencies without resolving the friction between positive and negative effects into a progressive world view. Not without a contradictory agency, then, the social context of Gibbon’s history is replete with frictions, reversals, and a series of altogether timely hesitations in social progress--in fact, Gibbon’s time seems governed by such contradictory (historical) agency, and thus, as “historian” of these processes, Gibbon does not foreclose their occurrence within his text. Drawing on Hume’s “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” for example, Gibbon reads Christian “enthusiasm” as a figure of emancipation in the destruction of Theodosian symbols of paganism, an act which he in turn reads not as a heroic overturning but as a mere displacement of pagan rituals and symbols, in which Christianity’s own symbolic equivalents of polytheistic fervour are substituted for the equivalent pagan elements of belief (*Decline* III, 188-215). Despite his express desire to articulate “the progress. . .the final triumph, and the gradual

⁹ For a slightly different version of this historical corruscation, see Pocock’s “Superstition and Enthusiasm in Gibbon’s History of Religion,” in which Pocock suggests that Gibbon valorizes modernity because of its plurality; its “virtues cannot be stifled because they rest on interplay, emulation, and commercial exchange” (91). However, that this is merely a phase in a more general movement of decline is suggested by Gibbon’s concluding chapters, the all too explicable moral failure of Rome (in many ways a temporally distantiated symbol of modern Britain).

corruption of Christianity,” throughout *Decline and Fall* Gibbon maintains a tension not only between an evaluation of the relative merits of enthusiasm and scepticism, but in the moral valuation within each of the two signifiers.¹⁰ If Gibbon would claim that the “art of man is able to construct monuments far more permanent than the narrow span of his own existence,” he would complete the thought of such permanence in the coda of an irrevocable decay: “yet, these monuments, like himself, are perishable and frail; and, in the boundless annals of time, his life and his labours must equally be measured as a fleeting moment” (*Decline and Fall* VII, 302).

Even in so brief a sketch of two powerful eighteenth-century historians, problems with reading (or dismissing) their texts or experience as governed by rather uncomplicated universalist, teleological aspirations and rhetorical economies surface. To fit readings of eighteenth-century texts to current conceptions of “memory” and “history,” then, is a Procrustean labour, since it entails the sacrifice of a significant degree of textual specificity for the sake of the solid bed of analytical categorization; through the chapters that follow I explore “history” and “memory” less by attempting to interpret the meanings that accrue around these words than by focusing analytical attention on practices that bring their secure designations into question. Thus, although in the interest of brevity I will orient an

¹⁰ Roger J. Porter suggests a similar reading of Gibbon’s *Autobiography*: having gone through six versions, Gibbon seems to have been “of two minds regarding the nature of the self and his role as autobiographer” (2). If Gibbon could “confidently apply” to himself the “common history of the whole species,” he meant by that phrase the history of accidents and intention, fancy and deliberation, and not the teleological unfolding of the subject in an objective history (32-3).

exploration of these texts through eighteenth-century conceptions of, and figures for, memory, the texts I analyse tend to blur any precise distinctions between history and memory: in fact, any particular operation of memory is often less a product of the individualized subject in her/his interior perception than the projection of a point of temporal apperception midway between the individual and the social worlds. Terms that reverberate across the last three chapters--“the social,” “body/text,” and “individuation”--are attempts to represent this liminal border between the individual and the social worlds, analogously a liminality between the subjective and objective locatability of knowledges, a predisposition toward interpretation that I will argue is a consistent preoccupation in eighteenth-century constructions of subjectivity, agency, and causality. Thus, my readings of eighteenth-century texts are of necessity as much components in a search for possibilities in historical methodology across varying critical assumptions and rhetorical strategies as they are sites of those methodologies’ interrogations of the assumptions of “the past.”

Similarly, if my readings accept the insight that history is at best the effect of a prior narrativization, the chapters I produce do not thereby attempt to effect a collapse of eighteenth-century texts into twentieth-century contexts, or to advance the analogous claim that history is purely a construction of the present text. Throughout the chapters I suggest that in my work, as in the eighteenth century, history is an act of the text as well as the text of an act; but if the historical text signifies in excess of a present critical reading, I do not claim an unproblematized “return” to a prior reality, thereby positing

explicitly or relying on implicitly an unproblematic causality made visible in the act of writing. In fact, I argue that this causality is at stake in eighteenth-century texts. For example, my readings of Congreve's dramaturgical theory and practice, Sterne's interrogation of the mechanisms of the social contract, Blake's radical collapsing of textual and bodily materiality, and Wollstonecraft's refiguring of the social body through writing reveal that eighteenth-century interpretations of "causality" are by no means limited to the affectivity of "the individual" or the authority of an external agency; instead, the discursive field--a distinctly intertextual one--is the ground for mediating and constructing alternative ways of thinking the vexed issues of causality, agency, and the role of the social body in both. Analogously, the historical context in which these works were produced as well as the works themselves suggest that the eighteenth century experienced an unprecedented proliferation of linguistic codes and social and cultural forms, and the often curious texts we find in the eighteenth-century--texts very difficult to categorize--reflect a dramatic intertextuality of rhetorical forms. Thus, each of the central texts I treat in the separate chapters also questions the transposition of present concerns into the language of eighteenth-century anxieties; in this reciprocal manoeuvre, the contours of a "history" outside of teleological ambitions, if not ramifications, present traces of their shape (and eighteenth-century shaping). With the possible exception of William Gilpin and Uvedale Price, for whom contradictions in agency do not seem an abiding preoccupation, all of the writers whose texts anchor the individual chapters question the most basic attributes of subjectivity, foremost among them the self-identity of the perceiving subject.

As recollections of the difficult process of individualization--by which I mean mapping, through dialogue, discursive language, empirical, and other social practices the social space in which, paradoxically, the individual's powers of autonomy will have a context in which to appear--each writer's texts attempt to reconfigure the mechanisms of a social and political memory. In order to represent the distinctly intertextual character of this process of re-orienting memory from a purely subjective to a predominantly social category I use different theoretical constructs and languages across the work; I adopt this strategy not because I valorize any one critical approach over others for reading particular authors, but because the specificity of the eighteenth-century processes of representation, in which authors routinely stage a multitude of discursive forms *as text*, seems to me to demand this approach. Thus, in my construction of terminology, for example, I observe no precise disciplinary bounds--the work is neither post-structuralist nor postmodernist, neither Marxist/postMarxist nor psychoanalytic (Lacanian or Freudian), neither formalist nor historical materialist, neither new historical nor traditional historiography, etc.¹¹ Instead, my use of terminology, critical approaches, and rhetorical strategies of necessity attempts critical translocations or transpositions of sedimented assumptions that in part constitute these particularized languages (with their particularized objects) and interpretative strategies as recognizable discursive fields: the shifting eighteenth-century

¹¹ Although feminism has influenced my critical practices to at least as great an extent as the general modes of theoretical inquiry I list here, I exclude its mention because I am not at all comfortable with suggesting that I can participate unproblematically in feminist(s) discourses.

thematic and linguistic matrices, the practical difficulties of understanding eighteenth-century temporalities and subject positions, and, consequently, subjective agency and figures of the transcendental in history, demand this approach. Thus, I conceive of the history of eighteenth century interpretations as a multiplicity of rhetorical practices and social texts, whose different figural strategies and their articulation as social practices must play against one another in the theoretical representations of my text as I believe they do in the eighteenth century.

But if different reading and figural strategies play one against another in this work, its individual chapters are not altogether devoid of continuity. In fact, with the exception of chapter one, which attempts to suggest the material density of eighteenth-century practices of representation by ranging more freely across the century, the texts and authors I consider are arranged in the chronological order of their appearance in the eighteenth century (although certainly this is not the only way to read their intertextuality). As this arrangement suggests, to some extent I read each of the central texts that form chapters three through six as the symbolic articulation of a moment in the narrative of early modernity; consequently, certain stages in their modes of influence surface across the express inter- and intra-textuality of the chapters.

If “history” has garnered much discussion in recent thought, memory has also come to the forefront of contemporary critical attention. If David Krell is correct in his assumption that the model of memory throughout the western metaphysical tradition has a

remarkable “staying-power” (*Of Memory* 5),¹² it may yet be useful to introduce a preliminary qualification into his fruitful analysis. The tropes which represent functions of imprintation, storage, and retrieval in the operations of memory--the “wax seal” as process for imprinting and the “storehouse” for processes of storage and retrieval--have changed little in the philosophical tradition and in the application of those figures in the wider culture; the role played by those functions in the construction of the mind’s objects of reflection and knowledge has shifted significantly from thinker to thinker, as my reading of shifts between Aristotle and St. Augustine suggests, and we should consider briefly those re-locations of the relative importance of memory in thought. Because Locke’s influence in the eighteenth-century is so wide-spread, I will focus on his re-orienting of Descartes’ description of memory and related processes of cognition.

In Renaissance and eighteenth-century studies it is customary to think of John Locke as the pre-eminent representative of mainstream British empiricism, and as the initiator of a set of meta-relations between the perceiving subject and the perceived object that have a stubborn persistence in contemporary thought. While there is little doubt that aspects of early modern thought continue to influence current structures of understanding, Locke’s *An Essay on Human Understanding* is often cited for its formal philosophical (epistemological) issues and rarely read for tropological dimensions in its communicative

¹² In a rich study of medieval memory, Mary J. Carruthers makes a similar point: “The metaphor of memory as a written surface is so ancient and persistent in all Western cultures that it must, I think, be seen as a governing model or ‘cognitive archetype’. . . (*Book of Memory* 16).

language.¹³ This occluding of the tropological is a constitutive event that attends the reading process; thus, “forgetting,” as I use the term here, becomes an active practice in the construction of knowledge. A reading strategy that gives due attention to, that remembers, not only the empirico-philosophical dimension but also the figurative language of *An Essay* reveals a radically different set of signifying practices in the text and can provide us with a fruitful means of exploring overlooked aspects of early modernity’s shaping of our present. Particularly *à propos* in a discussion of such “institutionalized” processes of forgetting is Locke’s presentation of memory itself and its production of (conscious and aconscious) structures of forgetting, especially if we emphasize Locke’s connection to Renaissance thought--in other words, if we view Locke as a writer indebted to Cartesian notions of memory and the forms of forgetting Renaissance “memory” generates, but also as a figure for a subtle if provocative shift in the operation of memory in processes of understanding.

For Descartes, “all our external senses...perceive in virtue of passivity alone, precisely in the way that wax receives an imprinted figure from a seal” (*Works* 410). As he writes in a May 1644 letter to Mesland, the relation between the soul and its ideas is markedly similar to that between “external senses” and perception: “I regard the difference between the soul and its ideas as the same as that between a piece of wax and the various shapes it can take” (*Philosophical Letters* 148). He immediately follows this metaphor

¹³ A notable exception to this tendency is Peter Walmsley’s “Locke’s Cassowary.”

with a consideration of material objects and intellectual objects in memory: “[a]s for memory, I think that the memory of material things depends on the traces which remain in the brain, after any image has been imprinted on it; and that the memory of intellectual things depends on some other traces which remain in thought itself”(148). Anxious to maintain a separation between the imprecision of materially-encoded images and the precision of images in thought, Descartes refuses to return to the dominant image of memory he himself has used in another context, and has re-directed in identifying the distinction between the soul and its ideas: “the latter [intellectual] are of a wholly different kind from the former, and I cannot explain them by any illustration drawn from corporeal things without a great deal of qualification” (148).

Descartes’ figures for memory and its relation to the *cogito* are largely derived from Aristotle’s metaphor for memory; unlike Aristotle, however, Descartes attempts to excoriate memory both from the active and passive functioning of understanding: according to him, complex deductions pass “so quickly from the first step to the last that practically no step is left to memory” (407). His refusal to figure the difference between sensory and intellectual memory is particularly telling in this context: at the level of his (non)language, Descartes makes memory all but invisible. Once memory becomes a fleeting site, a tenuous, intangible touchstone for the reception rather than the production of information (or the process of rational interpretation), memory and sensory temporality have no place in (rational) understanding. Descartes’ system of recollection both reflects and perpetuates, as a logical cultural product, the Renaissance fascination with such

formalizations of memory as Giulio Camillo's "memory theatre," arguably the most extensive if secretive project for the collation of knowledge in the Renaissance. In such all-inclusive systems, "forgetting," as a descriptive category of intellectual functioning, extends no further than the loss of discrete facets of knowledge; the structuring of memory itself in such "memory systems" occasions no reflection on the possible occlusion of knowledge. For example, Camillo's "memory theatre" synthesizes aspects of the older memory systems of Simonides, Quintilian, Cicero, and Tullius (and their inflections through such Medieval figures as Aquinas) with Cabalistic and Hermetic philosophy,¹⁴ in so doing, memory functions to systematize--not only to store but also to codify and classify--images *as* an organized life-world. In large part, the "deep structure" of the

¹⁴ For factual information about Camillo's "memory theatre" I rely on Frances Yates's finely detailed *Art of Memory*. Camillo and his Theatre were "as much talked of at the French court as they were in Italy" (138). As Yates describes Camillo's organization of memory, "Camillo never loses sight of the fact that his Theatre is based on the principles of the classical art of memory. But his memory building is to represent the order of eternal truth; in it the universe will be remembered through organic association of all its parts with their underlying eternal order" (142). In light of Camillo's ambition, although I will not pursue this line of reasoning further, we cannot and should not discount the political motives behind one aspect of the moral rumination occasioned by ruin, and the link between those motives and valorized structures of memory. Signifying moral decay for the spectator as did the royalty for many commonwealth thinkers, ruin symbolizes a natural fall of an amoral code of behaviour and organization of the social sphere, the passing of the "infelicitous" and infidious mode of courtly manners and existence (although ruin had other moral significations as well). "Memory," interpreted as an allegorical arrangement of ideas, entailed the maintenance of carefully observed and preserved boundaries in thought: systematizations in the association of ideas, and, perhaps more damning, the uncritical adoption of traditional chains of associations. A shift from "allegorical" memory to symbolic association--leaving behind or bracketing the allegorical exercise of memory so as to "free" perception--is also a political reorganization (from royalist notions of the observance of "tradition" to commonwealth interpretations of the exercise of freedom). In chapter one I will develop this notion of memory for different purposes.

“memory theatre” *is* the Renaissance life-world systematized; but such schematizations, designated “mere” memory systems, sanction a forgetting of the active process of creating the “world” through such schemata. Concomitantly, this forgetting, at least potentially, precludes certain re-structurings of the life-world that is recognized precisely as the ground--albeit consciously constructed--for recollection of facts *within* the world.

Locke’s work on memory, forgetting, and perception effects a significant movement from Descartes’ notion of recollection. Locke projects the metaphor of memory-as-container onto, and as, the most basic cognitive operations of the mind: in the absence of any predetermined principles in the mind, “simple ideas” become the very “Materials of all our Knowledge” (*Essay*, Book II, II.2; 119). Such ideas are mediated initially only by, and through, human physiological processes (Locke’s “sensation”); as such, Locke sees “simple ideas” as the most basic building blocks of understanding: “the senses at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet” (I, II.15; 55) that is the mind. In Locke’s temporalized trope, simple ideas are the basic perceptions, “the first step and degree towards Knowledge,” (II, X.15; 149) that provide the ground for thought, the significance of which cognitive process he articulates in an apposite formulation reminiscent of Descartes: “understanding” *is* “the power of thinking” (II, VI.2; 128). But Locke’s “understanding” is a fundamentally different process from Renaissance “understanding,” based, as the latter is, in elaborate memory systems whose express purpose is, paradoxically, to sanitize memory, to substitute *techné* of memory even for memory-as-perception, and to structure as well as eradicate a specific and highly delimited

form of forgetting. For Locke, if “perception” is foremost in the process of understanding, “memory” is foremost in the process of perception. In *An Essay on Human Understanding*, the “simple idea” is developed into more complex modes of knowledge through the combinatory operations of “reflection”; from here Locke’s presentation of “perception” takes a significant, if curious, turn: in a footnote he “clarifies” his epistemology when he writes that our knowledge of thought or perception itself stems from “reflection,” whose foremost operation is “Remembrance” (II, VI.2; 128). Locke not only foregrounds operations of memory in the process of perception, but also constitutes our knowledge of all processes of understanding as produced by and in memory. For Locke, before there is an object of knowledge to be remembered--before knowledge itself *becomes* an object for consciousness--there is the operation of memory. This seemingly offhanded qualifying phrase has enormous implications for Locke’s entire essay; it reveals the *Essay*’s continuity with Platonic, Aristotelian, and Medieval estimations of the importance of memory in thought. In fact, Locke’s “memory” becomes far more significant in the process of understanding than these thinkers’ systems of cognition allow. In its intimate relation to thought, memory precedes both any content within itself and thought itself--“thought,” in the capacity we are able to know it, is not only structured by but also created in the operation of remembrance. Thus, memory produces the most important object for the mind: knowledge of and about its own processes, self-reflexivity. Memory, then, threatens to subvert Locke’s epistemology, since in becoming the means whereby thought simultaneously remembers itself and forgets

its origins in remembrance, memory blurs the distinction not only between remembrance and forgetting, but also between an innate structure of the mind and a structure that becomes self-evident upon “reflection.” But these slippages in “memory” would fuel the very different directions in which Sterne, Blake, and Wollstonecraft would develop a socialized version of the non-identity of memory. Similarly, Locke’s re-inscription of the imagery of “container” or “cabinet” that is memory alters significantly the role of remembrance as re-inscribing a pre-existing or externalized world-view, even if, as in the Renaissance experience of the “memory theatre,” that life-world is consciously constructed and imprinted as a basic structure of the mind. The projection of an external world by the operations of the mind and the reception of inert data by the technology of the senses become all but indistinguishable.

Even more striking in this epistemological bind, then, is Locke’s imagery in his account of the mind’s varying capacity for retention: in some cases, “Ideas in the mind quickly fade” and “leave no more footsteps or remaining characters of themselves, than Shadows do flying over Fields of Corn”; in all cases, however, “there seems to be a constant decay of all our *Ideas*, even of those which are struck deepest, and in Minds most retentive” (Book II, X.5; 151). The human mind then becomes a sign for a continually approaching and encroaching death: “our Minds represent to us those Tombs, to which we are approaching; where though the Brass and Marble remain, yet the Inscriptions are effaced by time, and the Imagery moulders away” (151-2).

Here, Locke’s logic of and figures for memory reveal not only a curious imbrication of

recollection and forgetting, but also exposes a pathos part melancholic (in the Renaissance nuances of the term) in the *Essay* and, more generally, in late Renaissance/early Augustan human experience. In the absence of the cultural conditions that occasion Camillo's "memory theatre" as a site for the constructive "forgetting" of memory's propensity for fragmentation, Locke has little choice but radically to anthropomorphize knowledge itself: like the human organism that produces it, modernity's "understanding-as-perception" finds its origins and its finitude in the receding footsteps of Renaissance recollection and the "approaching tomb" of eighteenth-century memory.

Increasingly for modernity (as inheritors of Locke's notion of memory), then, "subjectivized" memory adopts the traditional terrain of "history," but most often problematizes the claim of objectivity associated with "history."¹⁵ Memory has long been constituted as a fragmented mode of cognition, the operations by which the minutiae of events become encoded as a property of the subject. But from Locke's *Essay*, this simple opposition between the functions of history and memory consistently breaks down in postmodernity, as "history" increasingly becomes the site of an anxiety of influence--by

¹⁵ In legal discourse and practice a certain carefully managed deployment of "objectivity" continues to imbue memory with an ontologically-invested truth-claim status. Another notable exception to this general movement in "memory" is the phenomena of "witnessing," in which individual stories are valorized as ultra-objective in their very limitations. "History" is emptied in the inability of the "witnessing subject" to bring its experiences to language. Without a language to describe or conceive a paradigm in which the phenomena witnessed can be understood, the subject relies on a broken, fragmented perspective which yet makes visible, as a kind of artifact of the subject him/herself, an objectivity in the extraordinary detail of the fractured narrative. See, for example, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony*.

operations of a memory which is beyond the subject's cognitive control. In the context of Locke's memory beyond cognition, his figures of erosion, loss, or decay, Freud's inter- and intra-psycho mechanisms for "memory," so influential in more recent formulations of the processes of the mind, seem a logical outcome. For in Freud's radical re-working of the mind's operations, consciousness becomes conditioned by systemic--regulated, biologicistic mechanisms--of displacement and condensation. These operations are, foremost, operations of "memory"--but memory reconceived in a particular way. Memory--the operation of storage and recall of images, which are, primarily, faithful representations of natural objects--becomes supplanted for modernity in these two primary operations by Freud's "unconscious." His study of the mechanisms of the unconscious consistently restructures memory as an atemporalized mode of encoding (or encrypting) reality. If the objects of memory are structured by an operation of primary "forgetting" or occluding at the level of the liminal site between the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of the (biological) mind, history becomes little more than the (essentialized) narrative of these processes of structuring reality. History, too, becomes desystematized at the level of its diachronic unfolding, since its processes must be interpreted both through *and as* the secondary operations of the unconscious.

Following Freud's logic, if history is divorced from its teleological ground, historiography is yet dependent on processes of memory. No longer systematized at the level of its diachronic axis, history at best is that which becomes visible only through a prior narrativisation (i.e., Frederic Jameson) and at worst, merely the effect of the

language of that necessary narrativization (i.e., Jean Baudrillard). As Felicity Nussbaum recognizes, the eighteenth century is “not an unmediated thing”; it is, rather, visible as a complex network of ‘adjudications and analogies, resistances and uncertainties, dissonances and gaps’ (“Politics of Difference” 377). Of necessity, then, history is systematically “subjectivized,” but this does not augur its loss: “history” can be reclaimed, paradoxically, *can be measured*, precisely at the level of its subjective functioning--in memory, which continues to carry the freight of a subjective knowledge of time, but which is valorized, in its splintering into fragments, as a more authentic mode of knowing. Thus, no longer is there “History,” projected as the tyranny of Hegelian world-closure and disclosure in the Idea--there are “histories,” often encoded linguistically as localized “memory” or “memories”--but the teleological, positivist thrust of “historical” progression is embedded in the very fragmentation of objectivity.

But this is neither a new discovery nor a recent re-discovery. If history and memory tend for modernity to signify opposing relations of subjective interestedness in the telling of the past--if only to inure memory as the ground of a partial reclamation of properties of recollection formerly relegated to history--both practices of remembering are unified in the empirical bases of their determinations, as John Locke made clear so long ago, and as eighteenth-century writers seized upon for possibilities of social critique and regeneration. In other words, the “collapse” of “history” and “memory” as distinct modes of understanding time does not mean that the two words no longer continue to signify in patterns of associations that remain significant for understanding how both

(post)modernity and the eighteenth century constitute their notions of their present(s) and their past(s), despite all appearances that the two modes of figuring time seem to have collapsed into one another quite recently--recently enough to raise the spectre of a "crisis." Orienting my use of these terms both throughout this introduction and for the remainder of this study is the assumption that "history" and "memory" are mutually constitutive, and further, that recent "disruptions" of their functions are continuous with much older tensions in the representation of time, agency, and subjectivity. In fact, the two figures have long been in a relation of *productive tension*, and eighteenth-century writers were aware that they were in an unprecedented position to *mobilize* that tension in highly provocative ways.

I begin the process of reading across postmodern and eighteenth-century interpretative assumptions in order to re-figure aspects of postmodernity's "enlightenment" through a consideration of the aesthetics of ruin in picturesque discourse; as we shall see, the very assumptions that govern Grosz and Liu's critical reconnaissance also deeply inform the eighteenth-century picturesque "renaissance." If chapter one investigates certain intersections in postmodern and eighteenth-century aesthetics and interpretations of memory primarily through picturesque discourses and experience, chapter two begins the work of re-orienting assumptions about eighteenth-century teleological strategies of representation. Congreve sets the stage for this re-reading, for his *Way of the World* and his theory of dramaturgy probe the role of language and representation in the linguistic construction of characters' subjectivities. *The Way of the*

World, I argue, represents a significant departure from the standard characterization in the libertine comedy tradition. By re-working the relations among wit, linguistic representation, and what he calls “humour,” Congreve revises not only the plot development characteristic of libertine comedy but also the structure of historical progression. In this aspect of its form, the play reveals a distinctly social form and formation of truth, one that neither asserts nor denies a pre-discursive realm of the subject, causality, or history. These factors of Congreve’s text and contexts suggest that the horizon of intelligibility in which individuality will be articulated across the eighteenth-century is opening to empowering, if troubling, new matrices of relations of subjectivity to time, history, memory, and thus, to notions of interpretation and understanding.

Sterne’s remarkably intertextual *Tristram Shandy* explores simultaneously both responses to the emerging modes of interpretation and understanding. If by the end of *Way of the World* Congreve seems to suspend agency between two equally adept wit characters, Sterne seems to implode agency among a number of equally inept subjects. Chapter three develops Congreve’s problematizing of individuality, identity, and history through its reading of Tristram’s troubled agency and causal control in a reading of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. In the chapter I explore the central issue of subject formation and its relation to the conceptual apparatus (the contract) and attendant interpersonal practices of promising that taken together work to ground “the individual” as causal agent--of both the social world and historical progression. For Sterne, the “individual” is itself a “promise” of agency, a reminder of an extra-temporal grounding of the subject--but

both attributes of the subject are constructed in and by the social world, and thus subjectivity is both a promise that cannot be fulfilled and an intersubjective space in which “the social” is (re)created. As historical agents, Toby, Tristram, Walter, Dr. Slop, Mrs. Shandy, and the host of other characters who make fractured appearances in the text retain only a tangential relation to historical and social causality. But for Sterne this inescapable condition of the individual does not relegate his text to articulating a disabling scepticism: Sterne presents not so much a loss of agency as a re-direction and redistribution of it in the social sphere. But this “agency” gives rise to a curious phenomena I call “the social,” by which I mean to signify a fundamental inconsistency brought about by the shifts in the troubled determinacy of relations of language, individuality and agency.

Blake’s *Milton* develops the problem Sterne’s agency poses for individuality. The means by which the individual comes to his/her identity occur in the text as the positing and collapsing of a series of violently incomplete figures. “The social” in Blake’s text simply reflects this process: like Sterne’s absent if operative causality, the identity of Blake’s text becomes indistinguishable from the body it creates within itself. This painfully-formed hybridity of spiritual and material attributes never quite becomes a whole, but, instead, continually fissures, fractures, and regenerates itself into further “productive” ruin. By the end of *Milton*, agency and individuality seem poised for an endless oscillation between development and repetition; and this movement creates “history,” but a history void of the memory of its own (de)formations, for Blake’s poem unfolds a history that

returns to repeat the very gestures of world-formation that *Milton's* framing movement from the "Daughters of memory" to the "Daughters of inspiration" seeks to escape (*Complete Poetry* 95). If Sterne parodies the inter-subjective return to sites of (individual) causality, Blake implodes the mechanisms for establishing identity. His textual/social bodies hurtle through their own intra-generational interiorities as through a lost memory of time, creating and destroying in a single act the past that has failed them only to be poised on the brink of a present and future ruin. "The social" looms as the violent repetitions of a disfiguring of individual agency; as such, "the social" becomes a body/text whose schemes of individuation, of self-reflexivity, and of memory collapse under the weight of an endless positing and refiguring, a dissociating energy.

My final chapter on Wollstonecraft's attempted revision of the social sphere draws heavily on the work of the three previous chapters. I anchor my reading of her texts in *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, for it is here that the predominant writing persona for her two *Vindications* takes incipient form. Although critics have relegated the text to the status of a minor work, to the extent that the text has been all but occluded by the "political" writings, *An Historical and Moral View* raises a series of issues about recent readings of Wollstonecraft's interlocking political, social, and feminist projects. Ostensibly a "political" history, *View* can with equal certitude be classified as *politicized* history writing, historicized sentimental novel, or politico-sentimental tract. But the ambiguities *Historical and Moral View* present, indeterminacies that destabilize the scholarly apparatus of genre classifications (and that are apparent in eighteenth-century

forms of writing more generally), also attend scholars' attempts to secure, as twentieth-century analytical and eighteenth-century material determinations, the interaction of categories of gender and sentiment throughout Wollstonecraft's thought. For Wollstonecraft's project to remain productive of change, for it to remain at all, such "revolutions" of the historical text need to remain visible as *tensions* rather than, as, for example, oppositions, since "oppositions" suggests the mutual enervation of categorical determinations, and thereby the imposition of overly stabilized subject positions and social relations.

Finally, across the range of chapters and texts I read is a concern with critical modes and models of interpretation. This attention to the practices of contemporary critique is an attempt (or series of attempts) to avoid sacrificing aspects of these texts' historical context to the exigencies of dominant and often interlocking postmodernist interpretative strategies--schematizations which subtend the expressly historical content of such analytical projects. As Richard Terdiman observes, theories, analytical categories, organize not simply what we know but also "what we notice," and I would add, with particular relevance to the texts I consider here, such schematizations also structure *what we do not notice*. This latter fact makes interpretation, too, a problem of and for (post)modernity's conception of memory: "by determining interpretation [theories] act inevitably as schemata for memory" (*Present Past* 15). Thus, even a theory that provides a valid interpretation inevitably also reinscribes "history" in the present, thereby shifting the internal relations of the contextual fields or the conceptual matrices produced by those

fields. And so the praxis of writing, as is clear from Congreve to Wollstonecraft, is the effort to effect a continuing assessment of *how* interpretations of validity, and validity of interpretative methodologies, produce the social imaginary. While not wishing to invalidate the existing “templates” for reading eighteenth-century texts and contexts, I do wish to displace them somewhat by stressing the profound intertextuality of an eighteenth-century social “text,” of which Wollstonecraft’s as well as Blake, Sterne, and Congreve’s styles are both a product and a production.

CHAPTER TWO

Sketches Toward an Eighteenth-Century Discourse: Memory, Ruin, and the “Progression” of Landscape Aesthetics in Eighteenth-Century Representation

Give them names, for memory’s sake. -- Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*

In “On Memory,” Aristotle attempts to capture the process of a successful act of memory. Describing “recollection,” Aristotle posits the first principle of remembering: “...one must get hold of a starting point. This explains why it is that persons are supposed to recollect sometimes by starting from ‘places.’ The cause is that they pass swiftly from one point to another, e.g. from milk to white, from white to mist, and thence to moist, from which one remembers Autumn if this be the season he is trying to recollect” (419). Aristotle’s statement is as much about the establishment of “place,” of noting the extra-human significance of particular sites of nature, as it is about an operation of the human mind--that is, about the process of specific associations the perceiving subject makes with, and about, physical, geographic location(s). As such, Aristotle’s statement can be used not only to re-collect notions of memory as “mnemonic” systems, but also to interrogate the relationship between human beings and the physical world that underwrites such conceptions of memory. The recent proliferation of studies that investigate, for example, logic’s relation to grammar and rhetoric, or the body’s relationship to a

Cartesian cogito, call into question the efficacy of the self-reflexive cogito to represent its processes without some a-conscious remainder; the traditional construction of boundaries between thought and body, cogito and matter, and thus, perceiving subject and perceived object are transgressed, as it were, *a priori* in human perception. In light of such developments in the tradition of epistemology, it is tempting to reverse the surface/depth metaphor I used above in describing memory's inflections in modernity--that is, that the relationship between human beings and the physical world is underwritten by Aristotelian conceptions of the mind's operations--and to say that the notion of memory as "storehouse" for external stimuli now underwrites the (discredited) border separating subject from object, perceiving agent from perceived referent. At the very least, without attempting to effect a reversal of the traditional understanding of the mind's relationship to the physical world, it could be argued that the notion of memory as "storehouse"--memory as a relatively simple, internalized reflection and collection of objects-in-the-world --imbeds, with all the weight of an unconscious history, a resistance to the transgression of those binary oppositions and the boundaries that the notion engenders. If this were the case with memory, such notions of "recollection" and of the mind's operations in processes of recollection would present a dilemma for postmodern/ poststructuralist theories that attempt to excoriate the long-standing construction of the subject's self-reflexivity without remaining indebted to the economy of western metaphysics (an economy much recent criticism occupies *in order* to transgress). Curiously, however, such a reversal is suggested by Aristotle himself; in fact, not only is this reversal possible

in Aristotle's "On Memory," it seems necessary in order to come to terms with Aristotle's theorizing of memory: the "starting point" that is "place" opens much more troubling questions about human agency than is suggested by Aristotle's claim to reflect simply the processes of recollection.

Firstly, what is the origin of "place" for Aristotle? He suggests that this starting point of cognition is inextricable from an operation of memory. As such, the question of "place" leads quickly to questions at the centre of historical research--what are the operations of memory that allow scholars to "pass" from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth? From the nineteenth "back" to the fourteenth? How is it that Aristotle can be made to speak for the eighteenth century? Answering such questions in postmodern "historiography" is a bit like discerning how a "natural" progression is established in passing from "milk" to "Autumn." Aristotle's seemingly mimetic description of a process of thought (memory) belies its equally metonymic character (milk=white=mist=moist=Autumn). How is the tension between the metaphor of a successful operation of memory and the metonymic character of the memory itself dispelled? This question can also be posed of the structure of historical research of course: if (literary) history organizes itself into, or, in the materiality of its facts, makes itself available to larger-scale movements, how do scholars move within designated time-frames? For example, how do we establish the location of an identity, a theme, or a conflict across a textual proliferation of differences that form the "records" of the eighteenth century? In "On Memory," Aristotle seems to answer such a question when he

writes that “...one thing follows another by nature, so too that happens by custom; and frequency creates nature” (*Complete Works* 718-19). A metonymic, contiguous, and contingent movement in the chain of thought, as in the quotation from Aristotle, becomes a mimetic re-presentation/experience called “a memory” through the social process of establishing and reiterating traces of repetition. But the “chain” of loosely-related associations that forms a “memory” in this curious process is a breaking of the interminable number of associations that are possible. Thus, the making absent of the metonymic nature of the associative process--the break or gap in that chain--appears in Aristotle’s example precisely as the metaphor that constitutes memory. Thus, in memory, each form of signifying chain (metaphor and metonymy) is constituted not only as the absence of its other, but also in and by the other’s displacement. As the chain of signifiers that Aristotle designates a successful operation of memory makes clear, the mimetic character of the example is not merely predicated on the metonymic nature of the signs (in which case we could expect the metaphoric, mimetic designation of the language’s functioning to subsume or, at the very least, to sublimate its metonymic quality); rather, Aristotle’s claim that his presentation of the operation of strong memory, “recollection,” is mimetic depends upon the preservation of its metonymic character. In Aristotle’s system of memory, the example of the strength of memory depends upon the subject’s ability to reveal the metonymic “place” as metaphoric operation of cognition, the principle of association; more significantly, the example suggests that, in acts of interpretation in which memory is involved, the ability to understand is predicated on the remembering subject’s

ability *to transform while preserving* the metonymic character of of the association.

The relatively recent development of narrative theory seems to have come to occupy, on the level of the philosophy of history, the position that subjective memory--a series of operations of remembering that are simultaneously internal to each individual subject and that overflow the bounds of individuals' thought processes, and thus, are external to the operations of any one subject--once occupied. The foundational claim in the field of narrative theory (much of which explores, often implicitly, the epistemological differentiation between history as a mode of public recollection and memory as a process of cognition internal to the subject)--from Frank Kermode to Roy Pascal, Paul Ricoeur to Michael J. Toolan, Theresa de Lauretis to Hayden White--is that "narrative" binds a series of contiguous "historical" events into a single, if polyvocal, trajectory, much like "older" concepts of memory achieved for the internal narratives of self that are predicated on the significance of operations of memory for self-identity. No longer simply the scaffolding upon which memories accrete, in contemporary narrative theory narrative itself becomes the material of memory, much like Aristotle's operation of repetition becomes not simply the form in which the material of memory is stored, but actually becomes the very operation of memory. To phrase the logical conclusion in an anachronism, Aristotle's "memory" begins to appear not a divergence from but, rather, a *rapprochement* of, in Jürgen Habermas' words, the diverging strains of modernity.

By modernity Habermas means the construction of the present as stemming from

Nietzsche through, on the one hand, Heidegger and Derrida, and on the other, Bataille and Foucault. Significantly, in an essay in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* entitled “The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point,” Habermas locates Nietzsche’s “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life” as the crucial document from which the diverging strains of modern and postmodern inquiry become constructed. Curiously, for Nietzsche, the memory of the present becomes immobilized by the monumentality of the past, and so, in the diagnostic bombast of his *Untimely Meditations*, this “memory” of the present becomes predicated on a willful forgetting of aspects of the past that has created it. In Nietzsche’s words, “Knowledge, taken in excess without hunger, even contrary to need, no longer acts as a transforming motive impelling to action and remains hidden in a certain chaotic inner world...and so the whole of modern culture is essentially internal” (24-5). But memory, as the site at which the designation of internal and external becomes an impossibility, operates as a problematic site demarcating interiority and exteriority long before and long after Nietzsche’s attempt to re-vivify processes of remembering; thus, Nietzsche’s efforts to turn the internality of remembering into a mode of action in the externality that is the world represent merely a turn in the long history of delineating the interaction between interiority and exteriority, or between “history” and “memory.” As a site at which logic and rhetoric, self and other, “natural” and human intentionality become imbricated, memory can be said to recollect itself for us in the present as a forgotten trajectory of Nietzsche’s thesis about causality in *Will to Power*: if causality can be said to occur in an operation of memory, that causality is

established only from the viewpoint of the already accomplished act of recollection. As Nietzsche asserts in *Will to Power*,

‘Causality’ eludes us; to suppose a direct causal link between thoughts, as logic does--that is the consequence of the crudest and clumsiest observation. Between two thoughts all kinds of affects play their game . . . ‘Thinking,’ as epistemologists conceive it, simply does not occur: it is a quite arbitrary fiction, arrived at by selecting one element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement for the purpose of intelligibility. (statement 477; 264).

With Nietzsche’s statement above we can understand the import of Descartes’ logic of memory in a different light: the struggle to separate memory from acts of thinking and understanding is predicated on the attempt to retain causality as the organizing principle of mental “association.” Locke’s reorganization of Descartes’ interpretation of memory introduces an element of uncertainty in the relation between causality and understanding, since the empirical foundation of memory also suggests that understanding, too, is dependent upon the perceiving agent’s partial knowledge of her/his situation. But Nietzsche’s “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life” also performs a forgetting of memory’s precondition: that memory implicates the subject in a “ground” that can not be designated either by an interiority of a perceptual field or by an exteriority of world events. If Habermas’s understanding of the trajectory of modernity’s recent history is accurate, this “forgetting” in Nietzsche’s text has important consequences for (post)modernity’s understanding of its own processes of thinking about time.

Nietzsche’s observation on the relationship of thought to logic also suggests a tension between operations of memory and contingent elements--in Aristotle’s example,

chains of signifiers--that constitute thought. For Nietzsche, chaos--the radically contingent--becomes a property of interiority, and the chaos of interiority (a chaos also suggested by Aristotle's metonymic chain of signifiers in memory--in Aristotle's example, the successful operation of memory appears miraculous) differs from the orderly representation of the interior faculties of perception in Locke's *Essay*. In addition to this difference, Nietzsche and Aristotle's comments raise a tantalizing question: how is it possible to "miss" a step in the metonymic chain of nature, and of the natural, given that "a memory" of nature forms itself precisely by missing or eliding some part of a potentially limitless associational process?¹ Any operation of thought, then, becomes a figure for a failed apperception of the natural. Clearly, such a relationship of thought to "nature," to the natural, suggests that the natural world is always overflowing the mind, is always somehow in excess of thought. Thus, to bypass thought, to depose the head, in Georges Bataille's candidly infamous formulation, is to move thought, by a kind of default logic, to a more authentic mode of understanding its own processes. This movement becomes a revolutionary praxis that for many postmodern writers signifies *a fait accompli*. Such a relationship between thought and the natural world is clear in much of the most recent work on materiality; Georges Bataille's "heterogeneous matter," developed from his work that revises the ideality that inheres in the surrealists' attempts to refigure "materiality,"

¹ As we shall see in chapter five, part of the problem of memory posed within the eighteenth century by Blake's *Milton* is that the associational process that constructs the human world is seemingly endless--that it proliferates dangerously beyond the conscious control of an intending agency.

remains indebted to the notion of natural excess over its reductions in, and by, human “fore- knowledges”--a construction of the problem of internality and externality that subtends modernity’s critiques of self-reflexivity. In other words, much of the theoretical revolutionizing of the relationship between self and other, human and natural order and ordering, remains indebted to a construction of the natural--in its opposition to the artificiality introduced into the natural by human “fore-knowledges”--as contingency, and that, therefore, accepts disoriented perception as the sign of a human cognition that approaches more authentically that “natural” state.

But such an understanding of the relationship between human foreknowledges and the contingency that has come to represent an “originary” state of human action in the world largely precludes the question I posed above: how is it possible to miss a step in the metonymic chain of nature, and of the natural, given that a memory of nature forms itself precisely by missing or eliding some part of an associational process? Aristotle suggests a different mode of investigating this problem: nature, as both a process of thought and as a reflection of “external” nature, is the established ground that “happens by custom,” that becomes visible as nature, and perceives the natural in the external world, in a certain repetition that lends itself to discourse or to an aesthetic response. Far from signalling a content/thought that is misplaced in the storehouse of the mind (one of Locke’s terms for memory), this process marks something more disturbing about the relationship of memory to place--this repetition fixes “place” as something not quite an idea, a geographical location, a memory, an emotion, but as some kind of metonymic composition of all of

these. In fact, Aristotle's notion of "frequency" seems to prefigure the penultimate perlocutionary speech-act (over)heard by Kevin Cosner's character in *A Field of Dreams*: "if you build [place]," Aristotle suggests, "[memory] will come." In what follows, I will explore what I have been figuring as modernity's forgotten legacy--the problematic nexus of identity, memory, the natural and the natural world--through both John Locke's theorizing of memory and William Gilpin and Uvedale Price's picturesque writings.

John Locke reveals his indebtedness to Aristotle's mode of constructing "place" in the processes of mind throughout his discussion of "retention": "Attention and Repetition help much to the fixing any Ideas in the Memory: But those which naturally at first make the deepest, and most lasting Impression, are those, which are accompanied with Pleasure or Pain." (150). Presumably, the more intense the emotion the more distinctly the memory is imprinted on the material of the brain; yet, according to Locke, this is not always the case. Abandoning a discussion of the retention of pleasurable responses in favour of the more encompassing experience that is pain, Locke focuses his discussion on the wisdom of a nature which ensures that "Pain should accompany the Reception of several Ideas; which supplying the Place of Consideration and Reasoning in Children, and acting quicker than consideration in grown Men, makes both the Young and Old avoid painful Objects, with that haste, which is necessary for their Preservation; and in both settles in the Memory a caution for the Future" (150). A painful impression can act more quickly than "consideration," which itself appears to be a pre- or extra-rational response of the human organism to painful stimuli. Are there Aristotelian "places" so forceable as painful

impressions that they stimulate no memory, no more or less precise linguistic gatherings of emotion, cognition, and geographical location, but that function instead as impossible repetitions, inescapable obsessions in what Gaile McGregor has called the “landscape”?

Such a response to stimuli would take us beyond Locke’s ruminations on the decay of memory, about which he writes: “...there seems to be a constant decay of all our Ideas, even those of which are struck deepest, and in Minds the most retentive; so that if they be not sometimes renewed by repeated Exercise of the Senses, or Reflection on those kinds of Objects, which at first occasioned them, the Print wears out, and at last there remains nothing to be seen” (151). In Locke’s “decaying ideas” the “Mind represents to us those Tombs, to which we are approaching; where though the Brass and Marble remain, yet the Inscriptions are effaced by time, and the Imagery moulders away” (151-2). This is a memory that first appears in the mind and then inexorably, clamorously, leaves it; is there an impression so painful that it effaces itself as an impression and yet remains a part of the mind? Such would be Locke’s “caution” for the future, a memory that registers on the body like a shock, but which will not move into a consciousness of the act or of the initial impression that causes a repetition of its non-conscious character.²

² Locke’s representation of this operation of mind has affinities with Walter Benjamin’s exploration of the value of shock in poetic experience: “Perhaps the special achievement of shock defence may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents. This would be a peak achievement of the intellect; it would turn the incident into a moment that has been lived (*Erlebnis*). Without reflection there would be nothing but the sudden start, usually the sensation of fright which, according to Freud, confirms the failure of shock defence” (“On Some Motifs of Baudelaire” 163).

Presumably, this is a sensory impression that is now known as an instinct--a system of reason and consideration so rapid in its movement that it abolishes all traces of its origins.³

But the abolishment of all traces of origins puts us in a grey area in Locke's "Mind," and suggests another possibility for a memory that effaces itself. The logic of Locke's movement through a diminishing self-reflexivity, starting from "Idea" and moving to reason, to consideration, to something "acting quicker than consideration" suggests something that can no longer be identified by the designation "memory"--what I will call, in its relationship to the material, natural world, a space of "pre-memory," but which actually takes us out of an operation of memory, since there is, properly speaking, nothing that is remembered in this space. Such a "space" is the liminality of both mind and nature, an "impression" that refuses cognition in systems of representation even though "renewed by repeated Exercise of the Senses, or Reflection on those kinds of Objects."

This extreme of responsivity--a response that is not yet a discursively recognized

³ This is merely an approximation, however; "instinct" and the "caution for the future" are not pure analogues, since excluded from Locke's theory of epistemology is the inference that biological conditioning becomes a determinant of the parameters of human knowledge and action, or, in the less mechanistic, less structuralist-inflected terms of Heidegger, excluded from Locke is the notion of "fore-knowledge," through which "thrownness" becomes an absolute restriction to unveiling, to the achievement of a full disclosure of and in Being. Locke's differences from the language-games of recent epistemological theory provides important insights into differences in relative notions of mind. Significantly, although the postmodern "mind" must double back upon its own efforts to know, it is bounded by the precondition that human understanding is bounded by what Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, calls the "analytic of finitude" (312; see also 312-335)--an understanding of human activity in and as the world that does not preoccupy Locke's articulation of epistemology to the extent that it does modernity's understanding of its own processes.

emotion, or that does not comfortably lend itself to the production of a discourse of emotion--must also be a "space" of pre-emotion; specifically, it must be a precursor, a pre-cursive, of the chains of discursively recognizable emotions open to eighteenth-century experience through various aesthetic discourses such as the picturesque (which, at roughly the same time as the emergence of the Gothic genre, shares in the regulation of such emotions as melancholy, horror, and terror, and binds their appearance to particular locations in the landscape). It is offered as a memory that is not there to be remembered as a first place. Such would have to be the character of the first memory, the Natural of the natural fixed by habit and custom, the inaugural movement of fixing, for example, an emotion, idea or geographical location as "a memory," a sense of "place."

One way to make such a response visible is to create an emotion to satisfy and regulate the demand of invisibility such an impression leaves. Such is the case, I think, of Ann Radcliffe's attempt, late in the eighteenth century, to dissociate "horror" and "terror." In an essay entitled "On the Supernatural in Poetry," she produces such a memory when she marks an unusual distinction between "terror" and "horror": "terror and horror are so far opposite," she writes, that "the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them" (xi). Her distinction does not state explicitly what terror and horror share: an exceptional involvement of emotion, of emotion as a register of experience, generally (if implicitly) understood in the eighteenth century as a provenance of the subject that, if it returns the individual subject more powerfully to itself, to its own responses, it also, at least

temporarily, suspends subjectivity between an inside--or "soul," a universal inside--and an outside, the material world.⁴ Similarly, her distinction marks the separation of the two emotions as natural, a naturalness that, prior to the appearance of her essay, is not visible in the discursive field of eighteenth-century knowledge and experience. Clearly, Radcliffe makes such a distinction in order to inaugurate an aesthetic of novel production, which produces a specifically Romantic/Gothic genre of writing and emotional experience. What may seem less clear is the way that this aesthetic produces a shift in the burgeoning taxonomy of eighteenth-century emotional responses (and the way in which these emotions both construct and reflect the landscape) to such an extent that her novels require, as they produce, a re-reading of the relationship between pre-existing discourses

⁴ The precondition for Radcliffe's form of distinction can be found in a letter of Descartes to Mesland. In a discussion of the "First Cause," Descartes writes, "I think that in the division of the parts of matter there is really an infinite series," and differentiates the soul from the ideas on the basis of the central metaphor of memory: the wax tablet. "I regard the difference between the soul and its ideas as the same as that between a piece of wax and the various shapes it can take..." (*Philosophical Letters* 148). He moves immediately into a discussion of memory: "As for memory, I think that the memory of material things depends on the traces which remain in the brain, after any image has been imprinted on it; and that the memory of intellectual things depends on some other traces which remain in the thought itself. But the latter are of a wholly different kind from the former, and I cannot explain them by any illustration drawn from corporeal things without a great deal of qualification. The traces in the brain, on the other hand, dispose it to move the soul in the same way as it moved it before, and thus to make it remember something. It is rather as the folds in a piece of paper or cloth make it easier to fold in that way than if it had never been so folded before" (148-49). Like Radcliffe, Descartes will attempt to maintain a separation between material and intellectual, lower and higher, forms of impressions on the brain; this distinction underwrites not only ideas of progression in aesthetics, as we will see in the picturesque writers, but also ensures the unerring self-reflexivity of the cogito.

of aesthetic and/or emotional response: for example, the picturesque discourses of such travel writers as Uvedale Price and William Gilpin and the earlier, more specifically philosophical discourse of emotional states in a work such as Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.

Radcliffe's efforts reveal the process by which emotions are created and shaped; however, a more diffusive process than the intellectual location and geographical locatability of eighteenth-century emotions occurs in eighteenth-century theorizing of ruin. In ruin's subtly nuanced representation is discernable a process of thought that refuses, that resists, at least in the eighteenth century, visibility. Moral "ruin" and physical ruins remain a constant fixture in eighteenth-century literature, painting, historical writing, philosophical works, aesthetic responses and discourse, political tracts, and theories of architecture. Poets such as Pope (*Moral Essay*), John Dyer ("The Ruins of Rome" 1740), the graveyard poets such as Thomas Parnell (*Night Piece on Death* 1722), Edward Young (*Night Thoughts* 1742-45) and Blair, Gray, as well as Thomas Warton (*The Pleasures of Melancholy*) included ruins in their poetry; painters of ruin such as Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, Nicholas Poussin, Hubert Robert, and Giovanni Piranesi were widely known throughout the eighteenth century, as were such writers as Robert Wood (*Ruins of Palmyra* 1753) and Gibbon (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 1776), who used ruin as a rhetorical, and organizational device. Similarly, Sterne and Swift exploit fragmentary formal characteristics in their writing. In addition to these literary and cultural responses to the specific forms of eighteenth-century ruin and/or fragmentation, numerous

landowners worked with noted landscape gardeners, dilettantes, architects, or theorists (i.e., Batty Langley, “Capability” Brown, William Shenstone, William Mason, and Thomas Whately) to incorporate existing ruins or commission the construction of “decaying” edifices in their gardens. Interestingly, Versailles remained in parts a monument to political, social, and cultural ruin: Louis XIV acquired six hundred columns from the ruined Roman city Leptis Magna for the construction of his palace.

Yet, a peculiar silence surrounds the ruin: no Ann Radcliffe appears to construct or to guide a discourse of ruin, and although the intensity of interest in ruins persists throughout the eighteenth century, no eighteenth-century discourse of ruin emerges to attempt to account for the phenomena.⁵ The movement to classify the eighteenth-century experience of ruin appears only recently, in Malcolm Andrews’s “The Evolution of Picturesque Taste, 1750-1800,” and is not without its own troubling implications (which Andrews explicitly recognizes). He constructs a table for the classification of eighteenth

⁵ For one aspect of the problem of coming to an understanding of the many discourses in which “ruin” signifies in the eighteenth century, Elizabeth W. Harries’ comments are well worth noting. In identifying the “related strands” of ruin as a rhetorical device, Harries suggests the artificiality of critics’ separation of them in modernity’s reading of the eighteenth-century: “the *non finito*, the ‘image made by chance,’ the pathos of the unfinished, the pathos of the inarticulate were all part of the intellectual context. . . To separate them as I have, and several other critics have before me, is artificial and difficult since they constantly underline and reinforce each other” (*Unfinished Manner* 47-8). As we shall see, the remarkable intertextuality of the eighteenth-century discursive field precludes a number of current strategies for understanding the eighteenth-century linguistic, cultural, social, and political logistics of representation through a reliance upon present categorical distinctions. The “peculiar silence” I identify here, then, is constitutive of the mode of eighteenth-century signification in general.

century responses to ruins. The five primary responses he recognizes are as follows: the “sentimental,” marked by an indulgence of melancholy and terror and associated with Graveyard poetry and sublime aesthetics; the “antiquarian,” an impulse to reconstruct the ruin in the imagination, and thus requiring “some architectural expertise”; the “aesthetic,” which indulges the impetus to experience the “pleasures of form and colouring”; the “moral,” which eventually exercises and assuages a metaphysical rumination on human limitation: “a ruin on one’s estate once served like a skull on one’s desk”; and, in Andrews’s estimation closely related to the moral response was the “political,” in which ruins became “a potent liberation from a Gothic feudalism” (*The Search for the Picturesque* 45-6). Each of these responses was not, of course, clearly demarcated from the others in the eighteenth-century experience of ruins, and thus, the “various” responses are not easily made amenable to the imposition of a specific temporal location in the eighteenth century; similarly, the “moral” response seems inextricable from the “metaphysical” response, and the moral/metaphysical response is itself inextricable from the “political” within Andrews classificatory system.

Most significant to the argument I am formulating is the fact that Andrews’s classification is based upon a particular aesthetic of reception; that is, the framework of his argument structures the experience that I have called “place”—in which memory, emotion, the material world, discourse, and reason create and receive (as a poesis that is indistinguishable from a mimesis) the landscape and the “I” that sees—as an emotional experience of the subject, and remains well within the picture of the subject that emerges

in Burke's *Sublime and Beautiful*. Implicit in Andrews's aesthetic of reception is an a priori division between an "I" that experiences and emotes and a material world that makes itself visible, describable, to that receiving entity--precisely the division that I am claiming is at stake in the gaze of the spectator directed toward ruin, and what could be called the gaze of ruin emanating toward the "individuated" or separate and distinct spectator. In other words, the gaze of the ruin seems to refuse the spectator's division from the ruin (and thus, refuses the secure identity of the spectator), since the ruin refuses to be clearly delineated--rationally, emotionally--in the predominant discourses in which it appears. Even when ruins appear within a discourse--notably, Gilpin's scattered theorizing on the place of ruin in the picturesque--a definitive account fails to materialize, despite John Aikin's remark, in *Letters from a Father to his Son* (1793), that "The newest and most fashionable mode of considering...[ruins] is with respect to the place they hold in the picturesque; and it is chiefly under this head that they have become such favourites with landscape painters and landscape writers" (264).⁶ In a 1781 letter to Gilpin, William

⁶ Price identifies an aesthetics of destabilized emotion/thought production when he writes of an "association of ideas" that makes the mind "unwilling to give them [the associations produced] a title" (*Essays* II 247). Price speaks of the impression of "vegetable productions...normally associated with the beautiful" with, and in, the context of ruin, where the associations "announce something of age, decay, and abandonment" (247). He immediately launches into a discussion of the "principle of association": "All external objects affect us in two different ways; by the impression they make upon the senses, and by the reflections they suggest to the mind" (247). Like Descartes, Price is anxious to separate the two modes of "cognition," which often do not appear distinct: "These two modes, though very distinct in their operations, often unite in producing one effect" (247).

Mason voices the limitation imposed on the production of ruins by the absence of a legislative theory of architectural discourse: according to Mason, “mock” ruins may, in the future, be what they should be, “when the rules of Gothic Architecture are ascertained & implicitly followed” (*William Gilpin* 118). In fact, the two major theorists and writers of the picturesque, Gilpin and Uvedale Price, differ sharply in the placement of “ruin” within their discourses. Although I will return briefly to Price’s comments on the problem of ruin for a picturesque discourse, I will explore William Gilpin’s remarks more closely, for the simple reason that he says far more than Price about ruins. In *Observations on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, and Sussex...* Gilpin describes the contribution that “a state of ruin” provides the picturesque experience, a contribution characterized by the discontinuity of associative detail:

It gains irregularity in its general form. We judge of beauty in castles, as we do in figures, in mountains, and other objects. The solid, square, heavy form, we dislike; and are pleased with the pyramidal one, which may be infinitely varied; and which ruin contributes to vary.

Secondly, a pile gains from a state of ruin, an irregularity in its parts... Thirdly, a pile in a state of ruin receives the richest decorations from the various colours, which it acquires from time. It receives the stain of weather; the incrustations of moss; and the varied tints of flowering weeds. The Gothic window is hung with festoons of ivy; the arch with pendent wreaths streaming from each broken coigne; and the summit of the wall is planted with little twisting bushes, which fill up the square corners; and contribute still more to break the lines (121-2).

Equally noticeable in Gilpin’s brief articulation of the function of the ruin in picturesque discourse is the assumption of unproductive plant life--“incrustations of moss,” “festoons of ivy,” “pendant wreaths,” and the “little twisting bushes”--into a productive economy of

pleasure. It is as though the ruin organizes itself, for the passive albeit constructive eye of the spectator, to such an extent that a “useless” production is not only invisible but unthinkable. Waste--the natural waste of decay, but also the needless and heedless proliferation of “lowly” weeds--is absorbed and contained in the utility of an aesthetic response. The possibility of a useless expenditure in the natural world is deflected by the utility of a human appreciation. Gilpin’s language makes visible a dual operation of the picturesque discourse: on one hand, his “description” makes the seemingly unproductive plant-life (moss, weeds, ivy, twisting bushes) visible to the point of valorizing its existence; on the other hand, that visibility incorporates the plants as a generic disruption of uniformity--hence, at the very least a movement toward the natural as contingency--in a generalized emotional response that yet brings that plant-life into a productive relationship to a human utility. Disruption itself, in the guise of an irregularity across regularity, becomes productive.

As John Dixon Hunt asserts, in “Picturesque Mirrors and the Ruins of the Past,” “there is a momentum from registering precise and detailed meanings of ruins, completing their vacancies with learned and specific knowledge, to responding simply to their impressionistic suggestions of decay and loss” (357). Hunt’s identification of such a shift corresponds with a more generally recognized trope of understanding the intellectual history of the eighteenth century: the movement from an Augustan, neo-classical mode of thought in the early eighteenth century, whose linguistic and iconographic figure of organization is allegory (or a relatively discrete system of association) to a precursor of

Romantic symbol “systems”--a pre-romantic mode of thought in which symbol replaces allegory as the central figure of thought, a far less discrete process of association between and among elements in a system of thought. With the “pre-symbolic” mode comes a rhetoric of emancipation, sometimes explicit, often implicit--a freeing of nature and of human associative processes that allows the natural world to speak itself and to speak for itself. Similarly, this freedom accorded the natural world by the viewing subject makes visible a magnanimity in, and “new” self-reflexivity of, the viewing subject before nature and before her/his own gaze, an ability to hear nature speak itself “accidentally,” metonymically, as it were. In *Observations on Modern Gardening*, Thomas Whately constructs this movement in self-reflectivity as a shift from imposition on nature to passive reception of the *sotto voce* of Gilpin’s weeds, of nature’s “own” articulation:

All these devices [of allegory] are rather emblematical than expressive; they may be ingenious contrivances, and recall absent ideas to the recollection; but they make no immediate impression; for they must be examined, compared, perhaps explained, before the whole design of them is well understood; and though an allusion to a favorite or well-known subject of history, of poetry, or of tradition, may now and then animate or dignify a scene, yet as the subject does not naturally belong to a garden, the allusion should not be principal; it should seem to have been suggested by the scene; a transitory image, which irresistibly occurred; not sought for, not laboured; and have the force of a metaphor, free from the detail of an allegory (183-4).

Gilpin’s “description” above employs both types of language relatively late in the eighteenth century: the neo-classical “festoons of ivy” and “arch with pendant wreaths” nestle in and among non-allegorical signs--“stains of weather,” “incrustations of moss,” and “varied tints of flowering weeds.” Although published posthumously in 1809,

Observations on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex... is based on notes Gilpin recorded in 1768-69--roughly the same period in which Whately's *Observations* appeared. The proximity in the writing of the two texts suggests that Hunt's identification of a generalized historical movement from allegorical systems of reference to symbolic or pre-symbolic, a-systems of association within the eighteenth century in part obscures the difficulty in the emergence of this self-reflexivity of the viewing subject before and within the natural world; that is, Hunt's insight, if it makes visible a shift in the understanding of the relationship between human and the natural world (it marks the attempts of particular eighteenth-century writers to constitute an aesthetics of reception based on a model of Cartesian self-reflexivity), also effaces certain differences and conflicts in the interactions of eighteenth-century discourses. Similarly, the 1809 publication of *Observations on Several Parts...* suggests that the reading public's demand for Gilpin's discourse, in which allegorical and pre-symbolic modes of reading the landscape are mixed, persisted long after Whately and Aikin asserted that allegorically tainted readings of the landscape, and consequently, of the subject who employed them in order to experience or construct him/herself, were *passé*.

If the later eighteenth century mixes these modes of understanding, what takes place in the earlier eighteenth century? Batty Langley's 1728 illustration, "An Avenue in Perspective, terminated with the ruins of an ancient Building after the Roman manner," also reveals problems in the more recent critical interpretations of the relationship between the early and late eighteenth century responses to ruin. Langley's illustration

offers ruin “after the Roman manner,” as well as constructs a rigid geometry of form in the spatial organization of the garden’s elements. As such, “An Avenue” seems to invoke and produce an allegorical reading in Whately’s (and Hunt’s) neo-classical mode. However, this mode of reading the landscape is interrupted by the specific placement of the ruin in the garden scape--or, rather, as the border separating the strictly ordered garden and copse of trees suggests, the ruin remains just outside the imposed, constructed, border that “encloses” the garden and/or ex-closes the ruin, and so, visually, the ruin both is and is not part of the garden itself. The “pile” is decidedly unbalanced, asymmetrical--unlike all other objects in the illustration. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect in the placement of the ruin is its centrality as an image; paradoxically, the ruin--itself disorganized, in a state of discombobulation--is the key organizing feature in/of the garden: from across the border within which order “naturally” prevails, the disorder of the ruin makes an emphatically human ordering of “nature” visible. And yet, the parallel lines of diminishing perspective draw the viewer’s eye away, again and again, from the centre of the human figure that serves as the focal point of origin--as well as the orienting centre of the organizing gaze in and of the garden--and toward the ruin. Yet, the obviously, humanly constructed border abruptly discontinues the conversion of the lines in a single point that would, in the conventional technical iconography of painting, “form” a horizon. In fact, the abrupt foreshortening of the convergence threatens to turn the illusion of three-dimensionality into a two-dimensional plane at odds with the “realistic” depiction of individual elements in the garden. Significantly, because of Langley’s placement of the

ruin image, the ruin assumes the metaphorical space of “the horizon”--in traditional iconography, a place of extreme association, an opening of perspective that allows a free play of associations. This is accentuated by the fact that Langley includes no clear differentiation of land and sky, and the border “separating” the ruin and the garden proper seems itself discontinued behind and beyond the trees.⁷

Langley’s illustration makes visible a relationship of complementarity between the earlier and later eighteenth century representations of modes of thought. Like Whately, and to a large extent, Gilpin in the later eighteenth century, Langley’s illustration attempts to dissociate the two modes of eighteenth-century “seeing” repeated in Hunt’s critical apparatus: “within” the border of the garden, a classical order, objects of allegorical association; “outside” the border, a more free, “symbolic” perhaps more dangerous mode of association, where “accidents” of thought can happen. And yet, the break in the lines of perspective, which helps to reinforce the strength of the border separating the two modes, must be completed by the reader of the image, invisibly, in the centre of the ruin. That is, the lines converge, invisibly, in the image of the ruin/horizon. Langley’s representation is completed only when the pathway, invisible in “An Avenue,” is drawn or completed by the eye--to link, without seeing or comprehending, beyond memory,

⁷ Other, roughly contemporaneous figures of ruins, such as those that appear in Paul Decker’s *Gothic Architecture Decorated* (1759) and William Wrighte’s *Grotesque Architecture, or Rural Amusement* (1767) also suggest a tension between the ruin and the architect’s control over its “ruinous” affects, although both Decker and Wrighte present not so much ruins as scenes of rustic employment of existing, decaying structures.

pre-emptively, the allegorical and “pre-symbolic” modes of understanding.

This same movement is apparent much later in the century in Gilpin’s discourse. In *Observations on Several Parts of England...Cumberland and Westmorland*, Gilpin considers ruins “a Sacred thing; rooted for ages in the soil; assimilated to it; and become as it were, a part of it; we consider it a work of nature, rather than of art. Art cannot reach it” (183). At the same time, Gilpin describes, in great detail, the restorative work of the “present proprietor” of Studley, who found the “cloysters, the abbey church, and the hall choaked with rubbish” (181). Although Gilpin does not specify what constitutes “rubbish,” he refers to the necessary work of clearing: “His first work therefore was to clear and to open. And something in this way, might have been done with propriety. For we see ruins sometimes so choaked, that no view can be obtained” (181). At this point, rubbish is that which obscures the picturesque view--human, but also nature’s own, “trash.” The problem with the clearing of Studley is that “few of the openings...are simple, and natural” (178), a situation that makes “the artifice...apparent” (178). And so it is not “artifice” to tamper with ruins in order to make them what they are to the spectator--this construction is not problematic in that it seems to return the ruin to its more “natural” state; it is the visibility of this tampering that destroys the “naturalness” of nature’s presentation of itself. Gilpin makes this mode of “receiving” nature clear: “The eye, roving at large in quest of objects, cannot bear prescription. Everything forced upon it, disgusts; and when it is apparent, that the view is contrived; the effect is lost” (178). The ruin moves from a sacred thing beyond art to a valorization of a specific type of

contrivance: an invisible “artifice” that mimics, while creating, nature’s most authentic mode of “self-presentation.”⁸

Close attention to the language of the picturesque writers reveals, finally, what is at stake in the rhetoric of aesthetic and historical progression: an implicit claim to reveal, as truth, a process of understanding that is far from a simple given, a truth-claim that may be nothing more than an Aristotelian naturalization of a process of constructing and asserting truth through a strategy of repetition. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, Congreve’s responses to Collier, Sterne’s consideration of “the individual,” Blake’s body/text “Los,” and Wollstonecraft’s revision of the social all attempt to denaturalize various associative processes of “the individual,” processes whose naturalness the aesthetic experience attempts, somewhat paradoxically, to re-inforce. These writers respond to, and at times make use of, textual constructions such as Whately’s, whose language of a movement from a restricted to a free association is echoed by Aikin in 1793, roughly twenty-five years later: “in ruins, even of the most regular edifices, the lines are so softened by decay or interrupted by demolition; the stiffness of design is so relieved by the *accidental* intrusion of springing shrubs and pendant weeds” (*Letters* 266; italics added). In speaking of his grotto much earlier, Pope had underscored the irony of this constructive “pact” between nature and human intention: in a letter to his landscaping friend Ralph Allen, Pope spoke of the completion of his garden, which needed only “the Frontispiece to

⁸ For a similar reading of this paradox, see Jean Starobinski’s *Invention of Liberty*, pp. 180-98.

it, of your rude Stones to build a sort of ruinous Arch at the Entry into it on the Garden side” (*Letters* 4: 343). But Aikin’s language suggests that the spectator of nature need only be demure in order to “receive”--even and especially if fleetingly--a language and experience that originates “outside” him/her: in Hunt’s words, “there is a movement from registering precise and detailed meanings of ruins, completing their vacancies with learned and specific knowledge, to *responding simply* to their *impressionistic* suggestions of decay and loss” (357; italics added). The language is a movement from “registering”--which makes necessary a learned knowledge, a collection of ideas in memory, solidified into an epistemology--to responding simply. Implicit in the statement is an aesthetic of memory: the movement of memory--here a bringing forward of a chain of associations already known--is that which blocks or impedes the “impressionistic suggestions,” the movement of “accidental” associations, that is “nature.” The mind that attempts to foreclose memory mimics the “accidental” movement that is nature itself, and so, there is no need to question the coincidence of the operation of mind and the reception of nature by that mind once “memory” is by-passed (in which “responding simply” is the sign of “beyond” or “outside” memory). As Hunt argues, Martin Price “drew to our attention in the picturesque moment...a play between ‘the need for reasonable common truths’ and the ‘imaginative power of *arbitrary* structures and *accidental* associations’ (as quoted in Hunt 356; italics added). And yet, as Aristotle’s description of the chain of metonymic, seemingly accidental associations that is a successful operation of memory makes clear, there may well be nothing arbitrary or accidental--which is to say, in this

case, received from nature--about the metonymic movement of a linguistic or imagistic sign "received" by the picturesque spectator in a free association (which is, at the very least, generally understood to be a mimetic reproduction of the free association--now "recognized" as metonymic--that is "nature's" voice). Presumably, the "reasonable, common truths" of which Martin Price and Hunt speak mark a specifically allegorical process, and a theory of memory, which harbours a dialectical opposition of nature and culture. Whately's text makes an implicit distinction between allegory as a mode of human memory and metonymy as a mode of experience that is not, or not yet, human memory--that is, that holds the possibility of a "first memory," a new, more authentically "natural" sign in the chain of memory associations.

The definitiveness of the eighteenth-century's movement from neo-classical to what I have been calling pre-symbolic modes of understanding is made more problematic in the diverging responses of the two primary theorists of the picturesque. Uvedale Price's response to ruins is somewhat more complex than that of Gilpin, although Price and Gilpin were writing at roughly the same time. Price, too, occasionally embraces a rhetoric of progression; the ruined abbey becomes an occasion for a generalized discourse of morality and an admonition against tyranny: "the ruins of these once magnificent edifices are the pride and boast of this island...we may glory that the abodes of tyranny and superstition are in ruin" (*Essays on the Picturesque* II 301). But Price is explicit about "leav[ing] aside [a] discussion of ruins, because ruins...stimulate too complex a response for the theorist concerned to isolate specifically formal, Picturesque qualities" ("Evolution

of Picturesque Taste” 50). The divergence in the treatment of ruins within the writings of the primary picturesque theorists suggests the diffusiveness of not only the subject who stood before the ruin, the fractured “I” that the ruin in part produced and that a movement into a discursive emotion would have helped to re-gather, but also of the emotional valence and volatility in that subject’s sense of “place.” Implicit in this diffusiveness is a necessary shifting of and in existing discourses. The ruin is not quite the beautiful, not quite the sublime, in Burke’s discourse; a mixture of pleasure and pain, and so neither pleasure or pain; spoken of most directly yet not comfortably ensconced in the discourse of the picturesque; at once the most concrete and abstract of places in the-landscape. Gilpin’s fleeting and altogether cursory remarks on the function of ruin in the picturesque landscape, Mason’s recognition, toward the end of the century, of the necessity of a regulatory discourse for the “construction” and maintenance of ruins (that would lead, of necessity, to the achievement of a template of the viewer’s emotional responses), and Price’s reluctance to domesticate ruins within an aesthetic response governed by picturesque emotions underscores the possibility that, to the end of the century, ruins continued to exist in a kind of pre-discursive, pre-discourse-ive, pre-emotional state, captured in “descriptive,” if widely employed, linguistic paradoxes. Thus, the ruin would produce what came to be known as an “agreeable horror” or, in Shenstone’s words, “a pleasing melancholy.” Far from constituting a shift from a neo-classical, allegorical mode of thought to a pre-symbolic, more freely associative mode of receiving and representing experience, the persistent and insistent eighteenth century fascination with ruin points to

another possibility. This fascination, coupled with the absence of a significantly regulatory discourse for the subject's responses to ruin, suggests that there was less a movement from one mode of thought to another than an ineradicable tension between them that produces shifts in the articulation of their relationship but that does not allow one mode wholly to displace the other--a movement of history that becomes visible within the eighteenth-century writers' registering of the irony of the artificiality of architectural ruins, and which the theory of (allegorical and allegorized) memory in part attempts to circumscribe.⁹ Ruins, then, constitute an impossible memory, a collapse of oppositional emotions, a non-existent place, that yet betrays its visibility throughout the eighteenth century. As such, we cannot give them a name, or an extended name--a discourse--without becoming unfaithful to their sense of "place."

⁹ Janowitz sees a similar strategy in the transferential effects of "real" and "artificial" ruin, evident in the contemplation that effaces the constructedness of both the ruin and its framing geography: "The actuality of historical transience, materialized in the facts of architectural decay, was repressed as real ruins became benign simulacra in the landscaped estate park" (*England's Ruins* 61). However, as we shall see across the eighteenth century anxieties surrounding textual construction, the reverse insight is also true: that "ruin" could also unseat human intentionality in constructing responses to "ruin."

CHAPTER THREE

'Whirlwind Within a Whirlwind': Congreve, Restoration Comedy, and the Play of History

Before we begin to consider the diverse accretions of signification that inflect memory in the work of a number of eighteenth-century writers, we can see in Congreve's dramaturgy and Restoration theatre contexts a number of shifts in linguistic, aesthetic, and conversational practices that contribute to and reflect the emergence of a new way of perceiving. The emergence of practices of associative cognition from elements of libertine social practices, turn-of-the-century moral philosophy, and Hobbesian political and legal discourse form the context for subsequent postmodern as well as Augustan revisions of memory, subjectivity, and "the social"; and if, in "The Aesthetics of Mercantilism," James H. Bunn's assessment of Congreve as a transitional figure between witty and sentimental comedy is accurate, Congreve can also be read as a figure of (historical) transition. The transpositions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century processes of association, as localized in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, will inform my subsequent readings of Sterne, Blake, and Wollstonecraft's texts and contexts as sites for varied articulations, productions, or re-directions of this contextual shift in the eighteenth century.¹

¹ As we shall see, I do not constitute these sites as "ideologemes" as Jameson would identify such sites. My own reading provides a more fluid intertextual or provisional reading of such sites, dependent upon inter-relational factors of producing the contours of such sites, which in turn can be re-articulated in any number of subsequent

In his brief but provocative “Dramatic Shifts: Writing An Ideological History of Late Stewart Drama,” J. Douglas Canfield identifies aspects of these shifts in literature and drama, while providing guidelines toward a revision of critical practices in literary history and, more specifically, Restoration drama.² Locating the transformation in conventions of representation across the “fulcrum of 1688” and, at the same time, grounding his reading in the political context of the late Restoration period, Canfield identifies a disruption of aristocratic hegemony, a transformation in the extraordinary resilience of patriarchal, monarchical and feudal economies of discourse. He historicizes this shift in politico-linguistic terms as a “radical shift in controlling or master tropes”--Jameson’s *ideologemes*. Canfield asserts that “England moved from. . .a master trope of word-as-bond to one of self-reliance”; although the “word-as-bond” trope survived in bourgeois economic practices, it “disappeared” from its centring role in literary representations, displaced by a “new series of tropes” (3).³

Undoubtedly, his identification of a significant disruption in, and consequent re-

relational structures. If this is far less determinate than a Jamesonian ideological criticism, it does allow a contextually delimited knowledge. Thus, I do not believe that this reading process is an indication of, or complicit with, the collapse of knowledge. Of necessity, it multiplies the number of associations any interpretation will produce and it construes interpretation as an intersubjective evaluation of differentials and continuities of that relational positioning.

² For an early version of Canfield’s reading of Restoration drama, see his “Ideology of Restoration Drama.”

³ See Canfield’s *Word as Bond* for a lively discussion of the history of this trope in social and linguistic forms.

articulation of, practices of signification at the historico-traumatic site of political change reflects the historically-situated anxieties of Restoration writers' representations of their own context.⁴ And he marks a long overdue need to revise current critical reading strategies of certain affects of that socio-psychic trauma on Restoration drama: much Restoration criticism continues to rely on aesthetic, formalist readings as well as a research protocol whose epistemological foundation at crucial critical junctures is the unmediated historical object. Such readings are as valid and valuable as others in certain contexts; but their over-deployment has the effect of excluding the development of other, equally significant and enriching scholarly approaches. The former methodologies seem as impervious to critical change, as resilient to a more open-ended mode of criticism, as the formal and tropological characteristics of aristocratic drama (which perform the work of aestheticizing and naturalizing particular hegemonies, developing asymptotic if not quite synchronic relations between existing power structures and "history").⁵ But Canfield's

⁴ In *Crises of Desire*, Edward Burns also recognizes that by 1688 social formations of power and subjectivity had changed dramatically. See "Marriage." Some eighteenth-century writers interpreted this transformation as continuous with previous religious and political upheavals. For example, Henry Neville understood the changes he experienced in the 1780s as a return of previous, unsettled anxieties: as Neville worded it in 1780, "we are to this day tugging with the same difficulties, managing the same debates in parliament. . . which our ancestors did before the year 1640" (*Plato Redivivus* 147).

⁵ In addition to Canfield's challenges, the work of such scholars as Jacqueline Pearson, Richard Braverman, James Thompson, David Roberts, Michael Neill, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Nicholas Jose, Laura Brown, Harold Weber, Michael McKeon, and Alan R. Botica constitute a significant body of work which reads seventeenth- and eighteenth-century signifiatory practices while taking into account recent theoretical perspectives.

own qualification of the temporal discontinuity across two master tropes duly acknowledged, we might benefit from thinking this foundation for an “ideological history” of Restoration drama through the example of Congreve’s dramaturgy and theatrical contexts. These two “historical” exempla further problematize the discreteness of the historical limit grounded by Canfield’s positing of a transference/sublimation of *ideologemes*; for *The Way of the World* unsettles the historical determinism of Canfield’s schemata, transgressing, as we shall see, the temporal designations of both “word-as-bond” and “self-reliance” tropes of discourse (tropes that are also figures of historical movement). In what follows in the chapter and in subsequent readings, I offer an alternative reading strategy in an effort to contribute to Canfield’s “collective intellectual and dialogical enterprise” (2). I draw on new historicist, formalist, and cultural materialist critical insights as well as literary deconstruction and more “traditional” historical research methodologies. But my own reading practices yolk together these disparate and often inter- and intra-textually diremptive possibilities in the hope that a staging of often surprising methodological juxtapositions will constitute a revitalized critical praxis while it constitutes the critical text as a productive site of ideological, methodological and formal tensions. A corollary implication is that the foundational limitations of any “one” methodology are informed and, hopefully, refigured by, their interpolation with/in other approaches; at the very least, the contemporary critic must think any one methodology against and through others. Throughout the present chapter I refer frequently to less recent critical texts because they suggest trajectories of epistemological influence and

projection in present critical works that attempt to shift the foundational assumptions of Restoration scholarly work, but which are, as Canfield recognizes, “significant. . .but few” (2). In this situation, reading what appear non-current thematic matrices through present contexts becomes an attempt to make memories of analytical possibilities appear from the future of “past” criticism.

In “Restoration Comedy and its Modern Critics,” John Wain exempts *The Man of Mode* from the charge that all the works of Rochester, Scroope, Wycherley, Buckingham, Congreve, and other Restoration dramatists are marked by what he calls “incoherence and indecision.” Of the latter writers he adds, “Did not these men...get their lives into a corresponding mess, matching the mess they made of their work?” (378). And Wain states of *The Way of the World*, “the whole play is full of disastrous and jarring changes of mood, owing to the presence of *irreconcilable difference*” (373, italics added).⁶ Wain’s remarks emerge from a trope of restoration drama criticism that, through the force of

⁶ Significant to the staging of this debate in the decade following the first issue of *Essays in Criticism* (1951) is the editorial note of the inaugural (January 1951) issue: “Our three desiderata [in the acceptance of submissions] are the critical virtues to be found in a supreme degree in Matthew Arnold’s *Essays in Criticism* (1865). There can, of course, be no question now of going back to Matthew Arnold. Nevertheless, as the majority of the contributors to these pages are--and are likely to be--Oxford-trained, it has seemed appropriate to proclaim in our title an allegiance to the greatest of Oxford’s literary critics.” For an idea of the parameters of the debate in this journal, see also F.W. Bateson’s “Contributions to a Dictionary of Critical Terms,” (89-93) and Clifford Leech’s “Restoration Comedy: The Earlier Phase,” 165-84, in the inaugural issue; F.W. Bateson’s “Second Thoughts: II. L.C. Knights and Restoration Comedy,” 56-67, and William Empson and Norman N. Holland in “The Critical Forum: Restoration Comedy Again,” 318-322, May 1957.

repetition over a considerable period of time, continues to exert a significant influence on contemporary views of both the Restoration period and eighteenth-century scholars' methodology. For example, Samuel Johnson's interpretation of the play has genealogical affinities with Wain's, and other, more recent scholars', remarks. Johnson focuses on another aspect of this "irreconcilable difference" in his life of Congreve. For Johnson "[e]very sentence is to ward or to strike" (*Lives* 16). In his view, *The Way of the World* enacts an excess of wit that makes Congreve's characters "commonly fictitious and artificial, with very little of nature, and not much of Life" (16). Like Wain, Johnson focuses on wit to support his judgement: "wit is the meteor playing to and fro with alternate coruscations"; this movement, this violent oscillation of wit, forms Johnson's final judgement of Congreve: "in mere confusion there is neither grace nor greatness" (20).

A critical corollary in its implications of moral uncertainty if not its explicit indictment of the play as an instance of ethical and aesthetic turpitude is Laura Brown's more recent *English Dramatic Form, 1660-1760*. According to Brown, the historical development of Restoration and eighteenth-century dramatic form experiences its own peculiar interregnum in the work of Congreve. Brown's emphasis on dramatic form--specifically, on the need of playwrights to discover or devise "a coherent form" in which to present their material--provides her with a critical apparatus that highlights Congreve's emphasis on experimental dramatic presentation, which she identifies as a search for "a

new pattern that will allow for the exploration of moral values in a social context" (117).⁷ Similarly, Brown's critical apparatus allows her to identify Congreve's drama as "a unique and isolated moment" of formal innovation distinguished "not for the undeniable aesthetic merit of its dramatic experimentation, but for its transience" (117); thus, in the play of history Congreve's drama occupies a formal and thematic interstice.

Although Brown's reading of Congreve's drama highlights many of its strengths, her critical assumptions also naturalize the presupposition that history functions in a classically dialectical, Hegelian teleology. Brown's nearly exclusive reliance upon formal considerations foregrounds textual reading at the expense of a reading equally informed by existing historical information. An example of the limitations such a reading can impose on an interpretation of the work in question is Brown's reliance on the inherent progression of "transient" or conflicted dramatic forms toward the realization of unity. To this end, she reads Congreve's career as a genealogical progression from the imperfectly

⁷ For a different reading of Congreve's early experiments with dramatic form, see Kristiaan P. Aercke's "Congreve's *Incognitia*." Aercke argues that in Congreve's *Incognitia*, there can be no question of the achievement of a penultimate form since Congreve takes the problem of dramatic the relationship of dramatic form to historical content as *Incognitia*'s object of investigation, thereby suggesting that all form is inherently an acting-out of reality. According to Aercke, "in the narrator's interpretation, verisimilitude becomes... 'the reality of the illusion'," whereas the voice of the preface speaks of verisimilitude as "'the illusion of reality'" (306). Aercke's assertion of *Incognitia*'s disregard for "verisimilitude" (in the chiasmatic reversibility of illusion and reality), as well as Aercke's extension of this disregard to *The Way of the World*, is open to question if we remember that Congreve's dramatic theory, as expressed in "Concerning Humour in Comedy," concerns itself with the difficult explication of Humour--which is, for Congreve, the difficult path that the real takes toward expression.

realized or fragmented forms of the first four plays to the unified final form of *The Way of the World*. Perhaps more important--in its implications for an understanding of the entire period--Congreve's *The Way of the World* is itself the preeminent embodiment of a more encompassing historical progression. As Brown states, "Congreve's last play, then, is the formal culmination of the warring [bourgeois and aristocratic] assumptions of transitional comedy" (134). In her critical schema there is an inherent (and, therefore, unresolved) tension between a work that is the formal culmination of its time period, and a work that, in its achievement of just such representativeness, achieves a singularity that removes it from the very continuity it supposedly represents. Brown "resolves" this tension by identifying Congreve's texts as the apex of a "transitional" phase in history. The historical presupposition of her entire explication of Congreve's drama is that this "phase" must be "worked through," as, for example, the sublime moment in Kant's "Critique of Judgement" is subsumed by the advent of a pure reason, or the sublime moment in Hegel's aesthetic is burned up in order to resume this simultaneously non-negative, non-positive moment into the productivity of a historical--specifically, dialectical--progression. Thus, in the terms of Restoration dramatic form, the moment that is Congreve's dramatic "unity" (which is for Brown the "unity" of "transition") must submit to the inherently moral (teleological) character of that fragmented forms' progression toward historical, dramaturgical unity. In its very unity Congreve's drama becomes the baseness, the depravity of historical progression--that which must perish in order to allow the progression of the history of drama to pass a moment of moral intercession. I will explore

some of the consequences of this critical assumption in a discussion of the figure of the audience and its role in projecting the meaning of *The Way of the World*. Before moving to a consideration of both the role of the audience in the play's initial reception and the figure of "the audience" in scholars' attempts to understand Congreve, we should consider some of the implications of Brown's and other critics' methodologies which have equally important ramifications for an alternate reading of Congreve: specifically, for the ethical movement that encompasses the characters' mode of relations in *The Way of the World*.

For Johnson, Wain, Brown and other critics of Restoration "libertine" drama, wit becomes a figure for discontinuity that threatens not only the narrative progression of individual plays but also the historical progression of drama itself. In *The Influence of Molière on Restoration Comedy*, Dudley Howe Miles asserts that "[Congreve's] love of word-play, to be sure, led him to endow his minor characters, the servants in particular, with too much brilliant wit, but in general his satire, frequently as it might suspend the action, had some more or less obvious relation to character and purpose" (128). Implicit in Miles' statement, as in much of the extant criticism of Restoration comedy, is an aesthetics of reception as well as an unexamined presupposition about the nature of the relationship among language, the social body, and the *a priori* appearance of the "Real" in linguistic and social structures. Isolating the central implications of Miles' critique can bring into focus a radically different reading of Congreve's dramatic works. Firstly, for

Miles, witty servants are not in accordance with the real or the natural.⁸ A corollary implication is that, according to Miles, Congreve aspired to present this “Real” in the space of the theatre, but his love for a particular form of dialogue--the havoc-producing witty exchange--produces insupportable diversions from the exigencies of plot development. But in his letters as well as his plays, Congreve deliberately constructs a far less stable structure in the interaction of the “Real,” the social hierarchy, and language than Johnson, Wain, Brown and Miles would assert. An assertion as valid as Miles’ above is that Congreve considered women, servants, and male nobility equally capable of, and in, an exchange of wit. Such a reading revises the presupposition that the dramaturgical writer merely reflects existing social discourses in the space of the theatre. This reading casts Congreve’s drama as a utopian discourse. That is, the playwright is using the theatrical experience in order to project a reality that does not and cannot exist currently among his contemporaries. Congreve then appears as a visionary with a clear sense of the necessary, if currently absent, “Real.” In this reading, the equanimity of wit in the dialogic situation of the plays appears a strength--rather than a fault--of the dramatic form.

The validity of the two variant readings points to the possibility that both assertions exclude a field of other equally plausible explications of Congreve’s drama, and suggests the need for a re-examination of Congreve’s dramaturgical aesthetic and

⁸ Nancy Lyn Tippetts also argues that “wit was a non-class attribute with classy and classic virtues. . . it could be found in servants as well as masters” (*Sisterhood* 5).

practices.⁹ In fact, an examination of his aesthetic theory reveals that Congreve does not claim to capture “reality” on the stage. In his “Concerning Humour in Comedy,” theatrical representation is always a re-presentation of the real, a turning back to the desire for the Real as a pure presence. In the essay both linguistic and dramatic representation cannot deliver itself from the epistemological uncertainty of supplementarity, of re-vision, and must continually return to the traumatic scene of its failure to inscribe adequately the ground of the Real:

the distance of the Stage requires the Figure represented, to be something larger than Life; and sure a Picture may have Features larger in Proportion, and yet be very like the Original. If this Exactness of Quantity, were to be observed in Wit, as some would have it in Humour; what would become of those Characters that are design'd for Men of Wit? I believe if a Poet should steal a Dialogue of any length, from the *Extempore* Discourse of the two Wittiest Men upon Earth, he would find the Scene but coldly receiv'd by the Town (6).

⁹ In “Imitation to Emulation” R.A. Zimbardo also suggests the need for a revision of understanding the “real” and the imaginary, ordinary experience and the projection of ideal forms of experience. “During the period which we are still disposed to call the Restoration . . . before *The Way of the World* was even written,” she states, “the conception of dramatic mimesis had changed so drastically from what it had been in 1660 or 1675 as to make such categories untenable” (7). If she sees that the “conception ‘imitation of nature’ undergoes crucial changes from 1660 to about 1730” however, her interpretation of the late seventeenth-century conception of this relation differs significantly from my reading of “the real” in Congreve. Outlining four stages in a chronological development, she places Congreve’s texts in her the latter period of stage “three” and the beginning of stage four, a movement from an aesthetic in which “imitation of nature is imitation of the actual” to the playwright’s attempt to “draw nature to imitate art” (2)--roughly, a movement from identifying social problems to the working through of those problems in the social imaginary space of the stage. As this chapter will demonstrate, Congreve’s understanding of the relation between “actual” and “imitation of nature” is far more mediated than Zimbardo’s temporal schmata allows.

Clearly, for Congreve, the Real is not a simple reflection of, and return to, prevailing social customs and situations. Neither is the expression of the Real an achieved linguistic or social correspondence with some *a priori* truth. Significantly, this aesthetic theory mirrors the difficult relationship that Congreve constructs among truth, wit, and humour in his plays. In this complex relationship Congreve's divergence from the dramaturgical practices of his predecessors and contemporaries is evident.

Congreve's 1695 letter to Dennis, "Concerning Humour in Comedy," is an attempt to theorize his aesthetic practices.¹⁰ Here Congreve identifies "humour" as the most important element in his comedies because it both produces and reflects the singularity of the individual dramaturgical character: "Tho' I make a Difference betwixt *Wit* and *Humour*; yet I do not think that Humorous Characters exclude Wit: no, but the manner of *Wit* should be adapted to the *Humour*" (162). In Congreve's dramaturgical preoccupations wit is secondary to humour; however, humour does not simply appear; humour is a product of the dramatist's skill of representation and analysis: "true *Humour* cannot be shewn, without a *Dissection* of Nature" (165). Although this statement appears proscriptive, in taking this quotation out of its context I have given it a far more descriptive, definitive sense than Congreve would allow himself: "I should be unwilling to venture even on a bare Description of *Humour*, much more, to make a Definition of it; but

¹⁰ William Congreve, "Concerning Humour in Comedy," in Montague Summers, ed., *Works*. All subsequent quotations of "Concerning Humour in Comedy" are from this edition.

now my hand is in, I will tell you what serves me instead of either” (165). Clearly, Congreve’s aesthetic theory questions the ability as well as the claim to reflect reality. The ubiquity of wit in his comedies now sheds a light different from that Miles brings to an examination of Congreve’s aesthetic practice: because wit is available to so many characters--it crosses gender and class boundaries, for example--it cannot be, for Congreve, the defining characteristic of individuality. In light of Congreve’s “Concerning Humour in Comedy,” wit’s divergence from natural presentation seems far less relevant than the place of humour and its relationship to wit in Congreve’s plays.

Although Miles finds Congreve’s use of wit disruptive to the social realism of the plays, he suggests that Congreve’s dialogue in *Way of the World* provides “a give and take” that is more egalitarian than Molière’s *Le Misanthrope*; “in Molière the other persons merely furnished suggestions for the sharpness of Célimène’s wit” (*Influence* 117). In Miles’ account, wit is much more closely associated with, the peculiar power of Truth: it is a clothing of Truth in the dress of one individual’s power of negating other characters’ truth-claims; however, in Congreve’s *Way of the World*, wit is the undressing of the power to clothe the individual will as Truth. The importance of this distinction is clear in both Congreve’s statements dissociating “wit” and “humour” in “Concerning Humour in Comedy” and in Congreve’s refutation of Collier in *Amendments*. Congreve suggests the singular appearance of humour in the former by way of negative statement: “Humour is neither Wit, nor Folly, nor Personal Defect, nor Affectation, nor Habit” (“Concerning” 165). Immediately following this refusal of a humour that reveals itself

fully as a content of consciousness, he suggests that Humour is not simply the voiding of another character's presentation of self; rather, it is the appearance of the "singular": "I take it [humour] to be, *A singular and unavoidable manner of doing, or saying any thing, Peculiar and Natural to one Man only; by which his Speech and Actions are distinguish'd from those of other Men*" (165; italics in original). The truth of the subject, the subject's self-identity, then, is not evident by way of the negating power of wit, which provides the speaker with the power only to identify a contradictory representation of motive, character, and action. A character's "humour" is by no means made self-evident through the exercise of a witty exchange.

The significance of this assertion has enormous implications for reading Congreve's dramas: "singularity," as a marking of individualization, a demarcation of identity, makes its elusive and allusive appearance only in the dialogic space that inheres in the relationship of one character to another. Humour, and thus, individuality, is the impression produced between or among dialogic partners. "Singularity" is apparent only in relation to another or other beings, and thus the truth of the humour is evident only as an operation of one subject's distancing of the self from others through figures of that other's identity. Congreve suggests that the appearance of humour is less a reasoned intellectual judgement, or a correctly perceived/received *a priori* Truth-of-character, than an affective, physical experience: "Our *Humour* has relation to us, and to what proceeds from us, as the Accidents have to a Substance; it is a Colour, Taste, and Smell" ("Concerning" 165). Thus, humour cannot be an idea--an object that the self presents to

itself for reflection--so much as an impression gained in the self's proximity to and, consequently, divergence from, others. He also states that, like wit, humour is "of infinite variety" (161). The individuation that "humour" represents appears only through the trace of another character's individuality; thus, the appearance of "truth"--in subjectivity as well as in any subject's agency--is, paradoxically, a social notion of "singularity." This is far different from the manner in which most of Congreve's contemporaries dealt with problems of self-reflexivity and the related possibility of teleological progression. For example, the way in which Dennis circumvented the problematic relationship between individual agency and historical progression is clear in *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*: "Now the works of God, though infinitely various, are extremely regular" (*Works* 335). For Congreve, the source and causality of Humour remains uncertain: it can be "either...born with us, and so of Natural Growth; or else...grafted into us, by some *accidental* change in the Constitution, or revolution of the Internal Habit of Body; by which it becomes, if I may so call it, Naturaliz'd" ("Concerning" 163; italics added). The joke on the characterization, and character of, Waitwell in *The Way of the World* is a direct consequence of this theory: in response to constructing an illusionary character of himself and, so, changing his life circumstances, Waitwell replies

Why Sir; it will be impossible I shou'd remember my self--Marry'd, Knighted and attended all in one Day! Tis enough to make any Man forget himself. The difficulty will be how to recover my Acquaintance and Familiarity with my former self; and fall from my Transformation to a Reformation into Waitwell. Nay, I shan't be quite the same Waitwell

neither. (II.viii,377)¹¹

Already we can see the difference between Miles' understanding of the function of wit in Moliere's *Célimène* and Congreve's notion of wit in "Concerning Humour." In Miles' explication of wit in *Le Misanthrope*, one person (*Célimène*) possesses the unreciprocated ability to deflate the others' claim to present the truth--and thus to know with certainty the truth of both the situation and the relationship between self and other within a particular situation. For Congreve, this immanence of the self with the self--the subject who claims a self-reflexivity that yet extends to a knowledge of the other's desires and capabilities--posits the need to consider the relationship of power to Truth.¹² He approaches these issues in his refutation of Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality and the Profaneness of the English Stage*. Deploying a variety of rhetorical strategies,

¹¹ This and all subsequent quotations from and references to Congreve's dramatic works are in Bonamy Dobrée, ed., *Comedies* unless otherwise noted.

¹² A comparison with the preface to Dryden's *Cleomenes* will make Congreve's "humour" more visible. In his criticism of farce, Dryden uses "humour" to signify the ability to vent his anger through the exposure of truth: "Were I in the Humour, I have sufficient cause to expose it in its true Colours; but having for once escap'd, I will forbear my Satyr, and only be thankful for my Deliverance" (219-20). Significantly, the power of an exposition of truth rests with Dryden--truth as well as the control of that humour that produces truth are his discretionary possession. Charles O. McDonald ("Restoration Comedy as Drama of Satire: An Investigation into Seventeenth Century Aesthetics" in *Studies in Philology* 6 (1964): 522-544) and T.H. Fujimura (*The Restoration Comedy of Wit*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954) argue that this position of the wit character's superiority is the basis of all comedy in the restoration; for McDonald, these authors have an "allegiance to the Hobbesian theory of laughter from a sense of superiority to the thing or person laughed at" ("Restoration Comedy" 523).

Congreve lampoons, satirizes, and analytically critiques Collier's implicit claim to possess an unmediated power of interpretation: for Congreve, this is a gesture more to be pitied than laughed at, and yet, dangerous for the social body. Congreve reads Collier's rhetorical performance as a gesture in which power and Truth are collapsed into univocal utterance; thus, Collier's performance is a naive language that does not concern itself with the relationship between the claim to Truth (the knowledge of univocal meaning) and the circulatory functioning of social power. Similarly, in the dedication of *The Way of the World*, Congreve identifies the ideality, the simplemindedness, behind the creation, enjoyment and criticism of type-characters, as well as the need of critics to interpret all plays according to this moral template of characterization: "Those characters which are meant to be ridicul'd in most of our Comedies, are of Fools so gross, that in my humble Opinion, they shou'd rather disturb than divert the well-natur'd and reflecting Part of the Audience; they are rather Objects of Charity than Contempt; and instead of moving our Mirth, they ought very often to excite our Compassion" (336-7). Despite this assertion, Congreve broke with the formal protocol of the dedication in order to assert his objection to those "over-charg'd with Criticism" (337).

Collier's *Short View* was a significant target for Congreve's direct refutation of a number of assumptions about linguistic and dramaturgical practices representation. W. Heldt attests to the popularity of Collier's work, which ran through four editions in the

year of its publication and was rapidly translated into French.¹³ George Merton and John Dennis voiced social concerns similar to Collier's, if they re-directed Collier's focus from stage immorality to the social practices and situations that occasioned the stage "debauchery." In Dennis's estimation, it was gaming and gaming houses, coffee and chocolate houses that had corrupted the stage; in Merton's legal-religious interpretation, the stage was only a small aspect of a much broader failure to adhere to rather strictly defined Biblical standards and the laws that reflect and protect those directives. All of these authors, however, were, in Larry Isitt's formation, tributaries in "a wide stream of repentance tracts, pamphlets, and books" calling for reform at the turn of the century ("Immorality and Debauchery" 52). Sister Rose Anthony cites the appearance of roughly eighty tracts over the twenty eight years following the initial publication of *A Short View* (Jeremy Collier 296-7). Regardless of various author's nuanced versions of Collier's social logic, his *Short View* was an ideological site charged with social recidivism as well as institutional reform.

In addition to his direct refutation, Congreve carried on a more subtle engagement with Collier; mediated through the stage props and explicitly mentioned in the dialogue of *The Way of the World*, Congreve perpetuates his critique of Collier by questioning the individual's gap between the inner motivation to make the divine appear and the claim to see God's work outside of human desire or interest. Immediately following a discussion

¹³ See W. Heldt, "A Chronological and Critical View," esp. pp. 42-44.

of the difficulty of discerning integrity in its close proximity to opportunity, Lady Wishfort directs Mrs. Marwood to the “Books over the Chimney--*Quarles* [’that makes God speak so big in’s poetry’]¹⁴ and *Pryn*, and the *Short View of the Stage*, with Bunyan’s Works to entertain you” (379). Clearly, Lady Wishfort’s publicizing of her (moral) reading underscores the division between the projection of moral observance in her public persona and the opportunistic ends that “moral observance” serves as her private motivation. In projecting such books as marks of “morality” through the raw symbol of opportunism, Congreve suggests that Collier’s “morality” is an ideological meaning-effect rather than a “natural” (or neutral) meaning.

These remarks will become more clear if we follow Congreve’s *Amendments of Mr. Collier’s False and Imperfect Citations*. Congreve refutes Collier’s claim to read Congreve’s or others’ motives by the pictures he/they create: “it were very hard that a Painter should be believ’d to resemble all the ugly faces that he draws” (“Amendments” *Works* III 173). In the same essay, Congreve also parodies Collier’s claim to unmitigated truth in language: when Words are apply’d to sacred things, and with a purpose to treat of sacred things; they ought to be understood accordingly: But when they are otherwise apply’d, the Diversity of the Subject gives a Diversity of Signification. And in truth, he [Collier] might as well except against the common use of the Alphabet in Poetry, because the same Letters are necessary to the spelling of Words which are mention’d in sacred Writ. (174)

The initial distinction between linguistic “Singularity” that is self-evident and the “Diversity” of “Subject” in “Signification” is collapsed in the impracticality, the

¹⁴ Added by Congreve as a note in the Dobrée edition.

impenetrability of a language that lacks the malleability necessary for multiple uses. In the use of implied rather than explicit parallelism in the syntactical structure, Congreve is exercising care in his delineation of the relationship between words in sacred enunciation and words in the situation of a “diversity of the subject.” Although he does not exclude the possibility of singular interpretation, neither does he imply that singularity of meaning can be self-apparent to any individual receiver; in fact, the implied impossibility of singular interpretation is underscored not only in the syntactical structure and the gently deprecatory but logical conclusion of the final sentence in the passage, but also in Congreve’s diction: he uses the past indicative or subjunctive form before “to be” to indicate the individual subject’s reception of apodeictic meaning (“ought”). The delineation of a singular meaning becomes an impossible duty:

Thus, Congreve presents Collier as lost without knowing he is lost, wandering--morally, socially, personally--between the masks of the critic and the Divine. In effect, Congreve points out to Collier that he must consider the malleability of his own as well as others’ discourse before truth: “I desire the Reader to consider that it is Mr. *Collier* the Critick, that talks at this odd rate; not Mr. *Collier* the Divine: I would not, by any means, that he should mistake one for the other” (179). That is, Congreve presents Collier’s inability to genuflect in his relationship to Truth. Congreve’s diction distances his own heated engagement, through Collier’s remarks, with the issue of truth’s relationship to social power, and reveals his care to avoid simply reproducing the rhetoric he inhabits in order to critique: his criticism is the “desire” of an individual who attempts to

communicate one of a number of diverse positions in the “diversity” of “subject” in “signification.” Similarly, the use of the first person singular for the voice of the refutation explicitly identifies the position of his own criticism as an exercise in the communication of his personal will, not as an unveiling of uncontested and uncontestable Truth. A comparison with Kant may serve to clarify the implications of this linguistic theory before I begin a reading of Congreve’s drama.

In Congreve’s post-1694 writing, language is close to a *techné* in Kant’s sense of the word; because it does not necessarily reflect the divine, language becomes a tool that simultaneously signifies the divine *and* the possibility that language functions at an absolute distance from the divine. The similarity in their theories of language is, I think, clear at this point; however, Congreve, in his dramaturgical practices, differs from Kant in his portrayal of the efficacy of pure reason to close the gap between practical and pure reason, and thus, to allow something like pure reason (or a purified exercise of judgement, virtue, or subject position) power over the necessarily social world that dictates practical reason. This distinction between Kant and Congreve is clear in Congreve’s limitation of wit’s effectiveness for establishing social dominance within the plays--specifically, witty interchange repeatedly introduces digressive elements in the narrative structures of the plays. Given Congreve’s dramaturgical theory and its applications to social issues of interpretation, this digressiveness is not a fault in the dialogue; rather, Congreve’s witty dialogue suggests a conscious revision of both libertine comedy’s conventions and the relationship between the drama and the social sphere. The multi-directionality of the witty

dialogue in Congreve's comedies is related intimately to what Congreve felt was new about his plays, and also has a direct bearing on the relationship of characterization to the appearance of the singularity that Congreve calls "humour." In order to work through some of the implications of Congreve's shift in linguistic and social perspective, it is necessary to turn to the problem of reading the audience's response to the initial runs of his plays. As William Pedicord states, "any appraisal of English drama and stage history from the Restoration until the close of the next century has to take into account theatre attendance, the composition of the audience, and patron's taste, all of which changed greatly during the span of 140 years" ("Changing Audience" 236). This problem of reception involves the company of actors for whom Congreve had constructed particular roles as well as the physical space for which Congreve had tailored the performative motilities of his plays. I will present only those aspects of this history of performance most significant to the thesis I wish to develop for a textual reading of Congreve's plays.

The conditions surrounding the creation of the 1694 establishment of a theatre co-operative at Lincoln's Inn Fields are well-documented by such scholars as Edward A. Langhans, Judith Milhous, Robert D. Hume, Donald C. Mullin, J.L. Styan, and William Pedicord. Based on the scant information currently available on the 1694 Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre, it seems reasonable to conclude that the small, financially troubled theatre could ill afford both the space for and the cost of elaborate stage machinery. In a time of cut-throat competition with the United Company this fact, coupled with Congreve's explicitly stated dislike for farce--another popular element of his contemporaries' stage

presentations--suggests that he had to rely more on innovations in characterization, and specifically, dialogue, than on the presentation of stage effects to attract patrons to the theatre. Needless to say, the physical and economic circumstances at Lincoln's Inn Fields were conducive to Congreve's exploration of dialogic situation and characterization. Another factor that must have played a significant role in the structure of Congreve's dramas was the composition of the company itself. The Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre co-operative was formed with the most experienced actors in England at that time, and these actors presented an exceptionally well-constituted company; however, if they were experienced, the majority of Lincoln's Inn Fields' widely-known actors were also reaching late-middle age, and their physical bearing--as well as the respect a key player such as Betterton enjoyed as a character actor--would not be particularly well-suited to stagecraft that required physically demanding activities or called for the undignified gestures of farce in their roles.

These facts would heighten the effects, on the audience, of under-played physicality and over-compensated dialogue. A comparison of the stage directions for the physicality of scenes in "The Old Bachelor" and "The Way of the World" is suggestive: although stage directions are few in Congreve's texts, Act three, scene eight of "The Old Bachelor" calls for a physical altercation between Bluffe and Sharper. In contrast, no strenuous physical scenes are expressly written in the stage directions of *The Way of the World*. It is probable that Congreve compensated for the lack of technical devices, as well as a less physical theatrical experience, by experimenting with the complexity of dialogue

presented on stage. With such a well-rounded company, Congreve was not limited to constructing stronger roles for individual characters and/or weaker roles for actors of lesser skill. This factor is more significant than many commentators on the Restoration theatre have realized: the situation of relative equality among the actors' levels of skill and talent, coupled with the need to rely on the talents of all performers rather than on technical effects or spectacle, led to a performance situation of give and take, and to relative equality in the complexity of characterization. This allowed Congreve to move outside the conventional moral framework of both the stylized relationships of hero to heroine, and both hero and heroine to villain in the sentimental "tradition," and the strict adherence to characterization-by-type common to other dramatists working in the humours tradition.¹⁵ This shift can account for the difficulty of placing Congreve's dramas in a historical context based on either *ideologemes* or genre classifications. A brief exploration of two contemporary critics' attempts to account for the reception of the comedies of the 1690s can serve to isolate specific issues of genre classification for a textual reading of Congreve's dramas. This textual reading can, in turn, isolate aspects of the relationship Congreve stages among wit, humour, and the play of history.

Both Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume have contributed extensive and insightful scholarship to explain the situation of Lincoln's Inn Fields and that company's

¹⁵ For an interesting account of the humour tradition see Brian Corman, "Thomas Shadwell." Although Congreve is not Corman's explicit focus, he does recognize that Congreve posed "a very different solution to the problem . . . of the deterministic nature of humours theory" (136).

relationship to its audience.¹⁶ Both scholars attempt to account for the sometimes bewildering reception that accompanies the staging of new plays in the decade before the eighteenth century. For both Milhous and Hume, the problem involves positing and/or accounting for “changes” in the composition of the audience, and both explain this “change” by formulating assessments of the new plays of that period on the basis of genre classifications. For example, Milhous states that varying successes of individual new plays are largely due to the styles of plays each respective theatre company produced. Because Lincoln’s Inn Fields produced mainly older style comedies--libertine or “cynical” comedies--and Rich’s theatre produced the new, sentimental or moral comedies, Lincoln’s Inn Fields productions “were out of touch with part of their potential audience” (*Management* 77).¹⁷ But this explanation does not account for the extraordinary success

¹⁶ See also Harold Love’s “Who Were the Restoration Audience?,” esp. pp. 25-28, for a helpful discussion of the manner in which the prologue addressed the audience; Emmett L. Avery’s “The Restoration Audience”; A.H. Scouten’s “Notes Toward a History of Restoration Comedy,” where Scouten traces the appearance of sentimental elements of Restoration comedy to Shadwell’s 1688 comedy *The Squire of Alsatia*; Harry William Pedicord’s “The Changing Audience,” for a broad view of the changes in the audience over the eighteenth century; Aubrey Williams’s *Approach to Congreve*, in which Williams reads the audience as inherently Christian, and cites “Congreve’s unusual deployment of religious diction and imagery” (157) in “Love for Love” in support of his view that those who wrote plays and audiences shared foremost a “schooling in the basic doctrines and precepts of the Christian religion” (1); and K.M.P. Burton’s *Restoration Literature* for a diversity of opinions on the nature and composition of the Restoration and eighteenth century audience.

¹⁷ Harry William Pedicord’s estimation of the change in the audience is similar: “There are sufficient grounds for thinking that audiences did change in quality and taste during these forty years [1660-1700], especially in the 1670s and 1690s, though the change might be thought of as one in which the stage educated its public” (*London*

of *The Old Batchelor* in March 1693, and the relative failure of the very similar *The Double Dealer* just eight months later (November 1693). Milhous asserts that the capriciousness of the playgoers' attentions, coupled with the slow change in the composition of the audience, accounts for the divergence in attendees' aesthetic tastes (77). Hume differs somewhat from Milhous, arguing

(a) that "cynical comedy" is not a valid category; (b) that even if we accept...[this] category, cynical comedy was not dominant in the 1680s--and was, in fact, disintegrating by 1678; (c) that a sound view of developments in the 1680s must deal with recorded revivals as well as with new plays; and (d) that the comedy of the nineties should be seen as a return to longstanding generic norms, not as a reaction against the sex comedies of the 1670s. ("Change in Comedy" 102)

Hume's sensitivity toward the place of revivals in theatre productions points to a problem with Milhous's theory: plays that compose Milhous's "old" style continue to be part of the popular repertory of both theatres (for example, the continued staging of *The Country Wife*); however, Hume's strategy of explanation--that "the comedies of the nineties should be seen as a return to longstanding generic norms"--marks his affinity with Milhous's explanation. Both attempt to account for gaps in contemporary scholars' knowledge of the composition of the audience or the popularity of the plays by relying on genre classification. The effect of this strategy is the occlusion of important affinities and differences of individual plays and playwrights with and from the traditions upon which they draw. Whereas Milhous's explanation overstates Congreve's adherence to the formal characteristics of such dramatists as Wycherley and Etherege, Hume's explanation

understates similarities between Congreve and these dramatists. As is clear from an examination of Congreve's dramaturgical aesthetic, Congreve borrows while subtly, if significantly, diverging¹⁸ from his predecessors and contemporaries. For the remainder of the paper, I will use the implications of my reading of "Concerning Humour in Comedy" in order to explore various aspects of Congreve's dramaturgical and aesthetic relationship to his contemporaries. Specifically, following Congreve's understanding of the means by which singularity becomes apparent, I will attempt to show some of the ways in which Congreve's *The Way of the World* asserts its own singularity in its relationship to two of the plays from which it makes its appearance: Wycherley's *The Country Wife* and Etherege's *Man of Mode; or Sir Fopling Flutter*.

Milhous and Hume argue that the plays of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and therefore, Congreve's drama, represent a return to the generic norms of an earlier time. However, Congreve's work implicitly questions such tropes of understanding. In *Incognitia*, Congreve displays an awareness of the problems of assigning an identity between the present and the past through reliance on the textual facts or narratives that produce history. Similarly, Congreve questions the expectation that reading provides wisdom or insight in *The Old Batchelor* when, in a conversation with Vainglove, Bellmour asserts

¹⁸ "Newness" is a theme that surfaces throughout Congreve's involvement with the theatre. For example, in the dedication of *The Double Dealer*, Congreve states "I do not know that I have borrowed one Hint of it [plot] any where" (114); in "Concerning Humour," of the theoretical presentation of humour he states: "I believe the Subject is intirely new, and was never touch'd upon before" (*Works* 10); and in the prologue to *The Way of the World* he writes: "Some Plot we think he has, and some new Thought" (340).

that “Wisdom’s nothing but a pretending to know and believe more than we really do. You read of but one wise Man, and all that he knew was, that he knew nothing. Come, come, leave Business to Idlers, and Wisdom to Fools; they have need of ’em: Wit be my Faculty” (I.i,25-6). Valentine’s attempted withdrawal from the social sphere into the wisdom of “musty Books” does not address the practical necessities of living in the social world (I.i,220); Jeremy’s overturning of “wisdom” marks his speech as an exercise of true judgement, even if Valentine qualifies Jeremy’s ability to escape the implications of his own language: “The Rogue has (with all the Wit he could muster up) been declaiming against Wit” (I.ii 223). If here wisdom is the affectation of wit through reading, and true wit is the ability to judge such devices of affectation, by the writing of *The Way of the World*, wit’s relationship to judgement is overturned by the vagaries of humour: the dialogic appearance of humour voids the efficacy of any one individual’s wit to judge and thus, exercise control over, a plot that will secure the outcome of the social situation.¹⁹ A comparison of aspects of *The Way of the World* with Etherege’s *Man of Mode; or Sir Fopling Flutter*²⁰ will reveal the extent of Congreve’s divergence from this “older” as well as “newer” comedy.

¹⁹ The appearance of the word humour in the plays indicates Congreve’s changing ideas of the relationship of wit, humour, and judgement. Humour is mentioned four times each in *The Old Batchelor* and *The Double Dealer*, six times in *Love for Love*, and seventeen times in *The Way of the World*.

²⁰ All references to *The Man of Mode; or Sir Fopling Flutter* are from H.F.B. Brett-Smith, ed., *Dramatic Works* II.

As Kevin Cope states, the problem of the satirist is “the battle of ideals with experience” which emerges “as a problem of action, a task for the will” (“Conquest” 24). In their comedies, Etherege and Congreve share the desire to explore this terrain; however, each addresses the problem of the individual’s assertion of his or her will differently. In *The Man of Mode*, the success of the assertion of individual will occurs along a geographical division between country and city, and a generational division between youth and age. These constructs are integral to the development of the “individuality” of the characters, and offer the audience a clear means for assessing the identities of the characters.

These distinctions also function in Wycherley’s *The Country Wife*.²¹ Pinchwife’s ideal of the country, where one can more readily rely on the difference between truth and appearance, is clear: “Why, I have married no London wife...at least we are a little surer of the breed there, know what her keeping has been, whether foiled or unsound” (I.i,245). Horner, the controlling wit of the play--one whose knowledge exposes the affectation of the other characters, but whose interpretative power appears only as an inability to understand his motives unequivocally²²--captures the ideality of Pinchwife’s distinction:

²¹ All references to *The Country Wife* are from Peter Holland, ed., *Plays of William Wycherley*.

²² As Robert Markley notes, Horner is the play’s “most disturbing paradox” (*Two Edg’d Weapons* 159). Many other readers have interpreted this aspect of Horner’s signification as does Markley, including Zimbardo, *Wycherley’s Drama* 89-96, 147-65; Norman Holland, *First Modern Comedies*; Robert D. Hume, *Development*, 97-104; Harold Weber, *Transformations*; Katherine Keller, “Re-reading and Re-playing”; and

“Come, come, I have known a clap gotten in Wales; and there are cousins, justices’ clerks, and chaplains in the country” (I.i,245). Over the course of the play, Margery learns to encompass the difference between the two codes in order to exercise her will; yet, throughout the play, the characters remain clearly distinct from one another and, as such, remain types. Despite Horner’s ability to control successfully the situations of his social world (to the end of the play, his eunuch ruse continues to deceive), Wycherley suggests that Horner’s way of life is limited because he cannot obtain the happiness of Alithea and Harcourt. As such, their marriage represents the moulding of a middle ground of country and city mores from pre-existing interpretative codes, evident in the final scene:

Lucy.: And any wild thing grows but the more fierce and hungry for being kept up, and more dangerous to the keeper.

Alith.: There’s doctrine for all husbands, Mr. Harcourt.

Har.: I edify, madam, so much, that I am impatient till I am one.

Dor.: And I edify so much by example, I will never be one.

Spark.: And because I will not disparage my parts, I’ll ne’er be one.

Hor.: And I, alas! can’t be one.

Pinch.: But I must be one -- against my will to a country wife, with a country murrain to me!

Mrs. Pinch.: And I must be a country wife still too, I find; for I can’t, like a city one, be rid of my musty husband, and do what I list. [Aside.

H.W. Matalene, “What Happens.” For related views see also Michael Neill, “Horned Beasts,” and Deborah Payne, “Reading the Signs.” But if Horner “disturbs” contemporary critics’ categorical imperatives, he nonetheless remains the locus of linguistic and interpretative power within the action of the play. Markley alludes to this power: Horner is “the chief cuckold-maker of his society, a standard of masculine sexuality” (159). Thus, Markley’s belief that Horner can be defined “only by the dialogical opposition of forces that his character brings into being” (160) does not preclude the interpretation of Horner as the preeminent signifier of “power” in his domination of the dialogical space of the play. In fact, the success of Horner’s paradoxical characterization constitutes his situational power over all other interpretants in the play.

(V.iv,339)

Despite the social and sexual allusions of the final scene, the characterizations of Alithea and Harcourt--particularly in their marriage--retain specific ties to a truth outside the social world in which they participate: virtue. The language in which Harcourt expresses his love for Alithea reflects this ideal marriage's connection with some entity outside the social: in response to a question from Sparkish, Harcourt tells of a love "above the world," which he places in the social world of measurement with the qualifying "or the most glorious part of it, her whole sex" (II.i 254). However, he later dresses in the clothing of a pastor in a scene which underscores the connection of his love to divine truth and virtue (albeit in a comic way). He loves the "divine heavenly creature," as he states, "with all my soul" (IV.i,295). The clothing of the parson allows him to dissimulate in the social world in order to state his truth in a private manner. His communication retains its ties to a purified realm of truth outside the social sphere in which it is uttered in order to be proclaimed.

This characterization and its movement to a realm outside the social becomes more clear in its affinities with Cibber's *Love's Last Shift*. Cibber melds the characters of Horner and Harcourt into Loveless in order to present a template of the central character's conversion; in effect, this requires a heroine whose characterization is idealized (Amanda).²³ This further stylizes the central character's shift in perception, and

²³ As Cibber remarks in the prologue to the play, the wit character is the centrepiece for the first four acts of the play, and is converted in the final act.

(anachronistically) suggests Wycherley's reliance on the idealization of the relationship between Harcourt and Alithea. That is, Alithea and Harcourt retain some notion of the ability to return to a truth that issues from within, although they must first master their social world's predilection to lie while dissimulating -- if only, within their own relationship, to leave this predilection behind. In other words, the existing social worlds of the town and city are passed through in order to enable them to reconstruct an alternative relationship in which they can freely identify their inner motivations to one another, and thus, act on them freely within the marriage. Thus, when Sparkish asks Harcourt "But how do you love her?" and Harcourt replies, "With all my soul," Alithea answers simply, "I thank him, methinks he speaks plain enough now" (III.ii,280). Once Harcourt passes through the social world of dissembling, Alithea feels no need to question the directness of his speech--the connectedness between his speech and a pure motivation. Clearly, his dissembling (i.e., his withholding of a disclosure) is not a lie.²⁴ In effect, both characters maintain a belief in the utter simplicity of the inner truth: by the final scene, Harcourt and Alithea become figures of the process of judgement that has been the narrative unfolding of the play.

In Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, the country/town theme is also a prominent feature in the characterization. References to the division of characteristics along geographical and generational distinctions are numerous. For example, when the Orange

²⁴ See James Thompson's "Lying and Dissembling" for an account of the difference between lying and dissimulation in Restoration texts.

woman alludes to Harriet, Dorimant thinks of her as a “country toad” (*Dramatic Works of Etherege* I.i,191); the Orange woman also reports Mrs. Woodvil’s raillery “against the wild young men of the town” (I.i,192), and Medley characterizes Mrs. Woodvil as follows: “the Mother’s a great admirer of the Forms and Civility of the last Age” (I.i,193). Other references abound: Old Belair states, “Youth will have its jest” (III.i,223); Lady Townley considers the playhouse and her home a “Common refuge of all the Young idle people” (III.ii,228); Sir Fopling Flutter tells Dorimant “Thou art a man of Wit, and understands the Town” (III.ii,229); Lady Woodvil will return “into the Country straight” to escape the “wicked Town” (V.ii,281). Like *The Country Wife*, *The Man of Mode* has a clearly defined conceptual framework that enables its audience an easy access to the moral issues of the play.

Unlike *The Country Wife*, however, the central character of *The Man of Mode* is morally ambiguous and was perceived as such by Congreve’s contemporaries: Dennis’s *A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter* and Steele’s *Spectator* essay # 65 outline two wholly consistent yet diametrically opposed critical responses to Dorimant’s character. This ambiguity remains at the centre of the play because Dorimant remains at the centre of the plot.²⁵ In the resolution of *The Country Wife* the central wit character (Horner) is

²⁵ Many other critics of the play consider Dorimant a figure of libertine contradictions; for indications of the range of readings of *Man of Mode*, all of which place Dorimant as the central, and therefore, controlling, figure of the play (and of libertine subjectivity), see Holland’s *First Modern Comedies*, 86-95; Brown, *Dramatic Form*, 43-8; Leslie Martin, “Past and Parody,” 363-76; Jocelyn Powell, “George Etherege,” 58-69; Robert Hume, *Development*, 92-7; and Zimbardo, *Mirror to Nature*, 22-8.

relegated to a minor role as the marriage between Harcourt and Alithea is given prominence; in *The Man of Mode*, Dorimant remains both the central wit character and the predominant love interest. In other words, the formal dénouement of *The Country Wife* differs significantly from that of *The Man of Mode*. Horner's appearance in the "list"²⁶ of respondents to the Harcourt/Alithea union (quoted above) symbolically relinquishes the control his character has exercised over the various plots and characters in his social world. This difference has important consequences for a reading of *The Man of Mode*.

In *The Man of Mode*, Young Belair and Emilia represent the middle ground that Harcourt and Alithea come to occupy in *The Country Wife*; however, in addition to appearing in every scene but two,²⁷ Dorimant remains in control of the unfolding of the plot of *The Man of Mode* from beginning to end,²⁸ although Harriet makes the final volley

²⁶ The repetition in the rhetorical structure marks these responses as a "list" in a performance situation as well as in a textual reading: the figurality of the characters -- their role as types -- would become highlighted in both the content and the form of the language. Contrary to producing an effect of verisimilitude, in the self-reflexivity of the language the characters emerge to proclaim themselves flat. The language places them in a position of supplementarity to Harcourt and Alithea: all those who follow them in linguistic structure are placed in a position of equality before them and, as such, assert their centrality in the conclusion of the play.

²⁷ Dormant does not appear in Act II Scene II -- which presents the dissembling of Young Belair and Harriet -- and Act IV Scene III -- in which Bellinda pays the Chairman for his complicity.

²⁸ The reversal that Loveit effects in Act III, Scene III -- Dormant's "jealousy" and concern for the damage done to his status when Loveit's attention is focused on the socially maladroit Fopling -- is temporary. In addition, Dormant remains in complete control of his presentation of self (and thus, of his true self); as Belinda states, "I have watch'd his look, and found no alteration there. Did he love her, some signs of jealousy

in their relationship. His schemes prove successful to the end of the play as a result of his ability to depend on his infallibility in judging other characters' reactions -- so much so that he need not exercise an adroitness in adjusting to unforeseen circumstances. His incomparable faculty of judgement in both character and situation is clear in Lady Townley's reference to Medley's character. She refers and defers to Dorimant's judgement when she describes Medley: "Mr. Dormant swears a Flea or a Maggot is not made more monstrous by a magnifying glass, than a story is by his telling it" (II.i,207-08). This control is evident in Dorimant's relationship to the plot; for example, his manipulation of characters and plot is so successful that Harriet takes an active part in his plot to humiliate Loveit: as Harriet tells her, "Mr. *Dormant* has been your God Almighty long enough, 'tis time to think of another" (V.ii,286). In fact, it is this final parry that humiliates Loveit: "Jeer'd by her! I will lock myself up in my house, and never see the world again" (V.ii,286). Dorimant also succeeds in winning over Lady Woodvil without a transformation in his character. As she tells Old Belair, "If his occasions bring him that way, I have now so good an opinion of him, he shall be welcome" (V.ii,287). Only Harriet can match his wit; however, because Dorimant exerts a predominantly more active control over the narrative unfolding of the events of the play, the results of his exercise of wit remain unmatched, if equalled.

would have appear'd" (242). Even as the reversal of control occurs, Dormant confidently reveals that Loveit's "success" is part of his plot: "had it not been for some powerful Considerations which will be remov'd tomorrow morning, I had made her pluck off this mask, and shew the passion that lyes panting under" (243).

More important, in Act II, Scene II, Dorimant's comment prefigures the state of his relationship with Harriet at the end of the play: "to say truth, in Love there is no security to be given for the future" (216); Harriet voices another truth of the play -- the second theme of the plot--which reveals her affinity with the self-awareness and self-control of Dorimant. As she states of Dorimant, "Some Men's Verses seem so to the unskillful, but labour i'the one and affectation in the other to the Judicious plainly appear" (III.iii,234). This provides an important insight into the relationship of characterization and plot: both Dorimant and Harriet are characters who do not question their efficacy to control the proceedings in the play. Equally significant, in the immediate social context in which they appear, each of the above remarks remains unquestioned by the characters to whom they are addressed. As something more than utterances in the diegetic space, these remarks take on a significance beyond the context of their appearance; thus, in both utterances, the character's voice is indistinguishable from the outcome of the play. This relationship of character to plot translates individual wit into narrative power. As characters, their equality rests in their shared assumption, borne-out by their experience, that they retain a superior control of and in all situations. Unlike Horner's relinquished superiority and Harcourt's and Alithea's ability to relax the vigilance of their control over the plot, Dormant's relationship with Harriet is more a sharing than a relinquishing of his control in both the form and content of the play.

In the characterization of Harriet and Dormant, the lack of the need to genuflect is most striking in their initial reactions to one another. In Act III, Scene III, Harriet's

reaction, "I feel as great a change within; but he shall never know it [Aside]" (235), marks her as another dissembler; however, the stage command also gives this speech the mark of truth.²⁹ This is a truth that, in its form as writing, blurs the distinction between the utterance as a necessary and conventional device for the exposure of her inner character to an audience, and as a testament to her self-possession (in which case there is no need for her to second-guess herself, since she is not divorced from "right reason").³⁰ However, the form her disclosure takes is evidence of her unerring self-awareness, a reading that is

²⁹ In "Apart From Etherege," David K. Sauer usefully distinguishes between "apart to" scenes and "asides." The aside allows the character who utters it a detachment from his/her situatedness in the play in order to comment directly upon that situatedness. Thus, the utterance of the aside often has a curiously metalinguistic status. As Sauer points out, in the absence of the renaissance soliloquy and eschewing "the French solution. . . the confidant(e)," English dramatists devised the aside to make characters' inner feelings/truths available to the audience (29). Less metalinguistic, in my estimation, is the *aside to*, defined by Sauer as a technique comparable to the aside, but in which one character will isolate another on the stage in order to confide crucial feelings or information (29). Etherege's *The Man of Mode* has seventy-seven "apart to" moments (29).

³⁰ Unlike Etherege, Congreve explicitly addresses "right reason" as problematic, which suggests Congreve's preoccupation with the relationship between social and meta-truths--even in the formal characteristics of his fiction. If we think of the non-diegetic aside as a reference to and invitation for the audience's ability to judge, something striking emerges from the stage directions of *The Way of the World*. There are two asides in the play: one non-diegetic and one diegetic. As the most accessible type character, Lady Wishfort speaks the non-diegetic aside: "Oh, he [Mirabell] has Witchcraft in his Eyes and Tongue;--When I did not see him I cou'd have brib'd a Villain to his Assassination; but his Appearance rakes the Embers which have so long lain smother'd in my Breast.-- [Aside." (V.ix,434). In effect, not even with Wishfort is Congreve extending to the audience the ability to judge character: his character's easily identifiable status as a type has placed her in the role of the prejudged, and so he can allow her an aside. In fact, in a play with no other asides such as hers, Congreve's use of the aside in her case serves to heighten her artificiality.

supported by her self-possession in many other instances in the play; that is, like Dormant, nowhere is she deluded into making the wrong assumption of any character or situation.³¹

Dormant's reaction to Harriet does not share this ambiguity between diegetic and non-diegetic space: when Dormant first sees Harriet, he voices his reaction as follows:

"Snatcht from myself how far behind/Already I behold the shore!" (III.iii,237). The spatial metaphor of self-dispossession identifies that a fall or a distancing from self (and the "right reason" he possesses) is an immanent possibility; however, despite the suddenness, the instantaneousness of the event in which the potential for the fragmentation of self occurs, the gap that the self would have to traverse in order to become self-identical is closed in the measurability suggested by the spatial quality of the metaphor itself. In effect, the

³¹ Yvonne Shafer argues that changing conditions for women are reflected in the content of the plays, which are also influenced by the composition of the audience. In marked contrast to the submissive and tame heroines of the eighteenth century, "women who 'were a strong force' must have reflected the taste of women in the audience (41). According to Shafer, women had a growing sense of equality, an increase if not in social autonomy, then in social mechanisms that provided a relative freedom of choice in marriage (evident, for example, in the number of elopements--an estimated 40,000 between 1660 and 1691) and improved levels of education for those who were middle-class. For example, according to Roger Thompson, in the 1600s fourteen boarding schools for girls existed in the London (*Women in Stuart England* 189). A growing visibility of women and women's desires is evident in the characterizations of women in plays by Etherege (Ariana and Gatty in *She Would If She Could* and Harriet in *Man of Mode*), Wycherley (Hippolita in *The Gentleman Dancing Master*) and Congreve (Angelica and Millamant in *Love for Love* and *The Way of the World*, respectively). Rose Zimbardo also notes that Hippolita figures women's demands or desires for representations of gender equality while observing a non-threatening decorum: in addition to her appropriation of the social power to establish the conditions her life is likely to take after marriage, she also signifies that "old-fashioned virtues are still possible though the age is corrupt" (*Wycherley's Drama* 53). As both Shafer and Zimbardo recognize, however, female wit is the basis for social gender parity in these plays.

metaphor--the linguistic device for positing reality--hollows out the potential for a divided subject in the fullness of Dormant's self-reflexivity. The subject that is identical to itself--*even in its fragmentation*--is the guarantor of narrative control and epistemological truth.

This is a site of a central difference between Etherege's *The Man of Mode* and Congreve's *The Way of the World*. Mirabell's metaphor for his relationship with Millamant is far different:

To think of a Whirlwind, tho t'were in a Whirlwind, were a Case of more steady Contemplation...There is no point of the Compass to which they cannot turn, and by which they are not turn'd; and by one as well as another; for Motion not Method is their Occupation. (II.vi,375)

This functions less as a metaphor that represents the reality of the experience than as an allusion to the inability of metaphor to provide the ground for an epistemologically sound subject position. The metaphor voids its usefulness to provide a means of measurement; instead, each allusion points to a lack of descriptive and associative efficacy. For Mirabell, this leads to the inability to ground himself in the coordinates of human knowledge: "To know this, and yet continue to be in Love, is to be made wise from the Dictates of Reason, and yet preserve to play the Fool by the force of Instinct" (II.vi,375). Mirabell is not alone in this predicament: at some point in the play, all the characters must contend with this difficult position in their relationship to self and other. Waitwell makes this concern with the self and the self's relationship to the other conscious when, after his artifice, he cannot return to the same self and cannot with certainty measure the difference between the two (II.ii).

Perhaps the most comic depiction of this game of selfhood with itself (and society) is Witwoud's characterization of Petulant:

Why he wou'd slip you out of this Chocolate-house, just when your Back was turn'd-- whip he was gone;--Then trip to his Lodging, clap on a Hood and Scarf, and Mask, slap into a Hackney-Coach, and drive hither to the Door again in a trice; where he wou'd send in for himself, that I mean, call for himself, wait for himself, nay and what's more, not finding himself, sometimes leave a Letter for himself. (I.viii,354)

Implicit in this desperate gesture is the acceptance of the social nature of the projection of self; that is, much of the construction of the self both passes through words like currency, and is projected by language, as an act of dialogue between two participants becomes a mutual creation of subjectivity. For example, Petulant and Witwoud's escalating linguistic creations of one another collapse this process into absurdity:

Pet. Witwoud--You are an Annihilator of Sense.

Wit. Thou art a Retailer of Phrases; and dost deal in Remnants of Remnants, like a Maker of Pincushins--thou art in truth (metaphorically speaking) a Speaker of Short-hand.

Pet. Thou art (without a Figure) just one half of an Ass, and Baldwin yonder, thy half Brother, is the rest--A Gemini of Asses split, would make just four of you. (IV.viii,411)

The chiasmic structure of their exchange simultaneously asserts and denies the truth content of each assertion. Witwoud's "metaphors" issue from the activities of real, empirical life; Petulant's "literality" is drawn, in part, from the fictional world that is *Reynard the Fox*. And yet, Witwoud's assertion does annihilate the truth and sense certainty of his own statement, as Petulant claims; Petulant does piece together, badly, remnants of empirical, fictional, and astrological discourse, as Witwoud claims. Each reflects a truth about the other of which the self is unaware or would work to conceal. An earlier exchange between Mirabell and Millamant exposes the implications of the need for

others to form the self, as both recognize that interpretation is power:

Mira. You wou'd affect a Cruelty which is not your Nature; your true Vanity is in the Power of pleasing.

Milla. O I ask your Pardon for that--Ones Cruelty is ones Power, and when one parts with ones Cruelty, one parts with ones Power...

Mira. Ay, Ay, suffer your Cruelty to ruin the Object of your Power, to destroy your Lover--And then how vain, how lost a Thing you'll be?...For Beauty is the Lover's Gift; 'tis he bestows your Charms--Your Glass is all a Cheat. (II.iv,372)

If power issues from the social situation--the necessity of one human being's interpretation of another--the subject that attempts to withdraw from this necessity, whether by physical withdrawal or linguistic posturing, is quickly returned to a position where the claim to an external power is questioned. The attempts of various characters to assert a non-dialogic truth are ridiculed or ridiculous. When Mirabell attempts to encapsulate the human condition, Millamant immediately qualifies his proclamation:

Mir. I say that a Man may as soon make a Friend by his Wit, or a Fortune by his Honesty, as win a Woman with Plain-dealing and Sincerity.

Milla. Sententious Mirabell! Prithee don't look with that violent and inflexible wise Face, like Solomon at the dividing of the Child in an old Tapestry Hanging. (II.v,374)

In effect, Millamant questions his implicit claim to an exclusive moral stance. Similarly, when Fainall attempts unsuccessfully to gain Mrs. Marwood's compliance (II.iii), he eventually drops his pretence to speak "Truth" and asks her to "be persuaded" (367). Perhaps the most clear instance of the invalidity of the self-identical statement that means only what it states--where literality no longer need approach itself--occurs in the Witwoud/Petulant debate about proof:

Pet. If he says Black's Black--If I have a Humour to say 'tis Blue--Let that pass--All's one for that. If I have a Humour to prove it, it must be granted.

Wit. Not positively must--But it may--It may.

Pet. Yes, it positively must, upon Proof positive.

Wit. Ay, upon Proof positive it must; but upon Proof presumptive it only may. That's a Logical Distinction now, Madam.

Mrs. Mar. I perceive your Debates are of Importance, and very learnedly handled.

Pet. Importance is one Thing, and Learning's another; but a Debate's a Debate, that I assert. (III.xiii,390)

The function of humour in the passage above suggests that humour, as a singularity of will or of action, intercedes in the deadlock of logical positionings and of wit. Of the seventeen mentions of "humour" in the play (one of which is in the prologue), nine are spoken by Petulant who, at one point in the play, explicitly marks humour as the intervention that constructs subjectivity: "If I have a Humour to quarrel, I can make less Matters conclude Premises,--If you are not handsom, what then; If I have a Humour to prove it?" (IV.ix,412). Because all of these characters find their equals in wit as well as their equals in dissembling, there is, for them, no direct source of truth that is external to wit. This complication in the traditional dramaturgical relationship of truth to wit and humour is consistent with Congreve's lack of a clear distinction between wit and humour in "Concerning Humour in Comedy," and also suggests that humour, as a singularity (that quality that gives to the individual his/her distinctness from all other beings) emerges across the theatrical sign of wit--not in language or in action but in the enactment of both as it occurs in the dialogic relationship of wit-character to wit-character. In such a world, Truth is a shared achievement of the recognition that each character must approach the other's humour continuously--that humour, truth, wit, and the full disclosure of

subjectivity can shift with each dialogue that takes place. For Mirabell and Millamant, the necessity of defining selfhood becomes a game of narrating, in the action of the stage, the relationship with the other in that this movement is an always postponed definitiveness that refuses to recognize the conventional strictures of the legal, commercial, and social machinery of marriage. Thus, Congreve's central characters do not experience a *revelation* of truth--that is, truth itself cannot claim the status of a sign that one character can wield over another--although this invalid claim is, of course, part of all the characters' game of courtship, friendship, and domination. In this sense, the interaction of wit, humour, and Truth closely resembles Hans Georg Gadamer's description of "play" in "Play as the Clue to Ontological Explanation":

If we examine how the word "play" is used and concentrate on its so-called metaphorical senses...In each case what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end...rather, it renews itself in constant repetition. The movement backward and forward is obviously so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play as such has, as it were, no substrate. It is the game that is played--it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it. The play is the occurrence of the movement as such...In our concept of play, the difference between belief and pretense is dissolved. (*Truth and Method* 103-04)

Millamant and Mirabell's agreement to renew dissimulation--in effect, their marriage--is an agreement to remind the other that neither participant can claim the superiority of a truth that definitively reveals: the "self," the "self" to the self (because these characters consider wit to be their distinguishing characteristic, the exercise of which will succeed each time they attempt to construct the situation in order to control that

situation), the other, the self to the other, and the other to the self. To think Congreve's play through Gadamer's "play," the difference between "belief and pretense" dissolves in Millamant and Mirabell's formalization of the movement between these two extremes. For this reason, the two must enact a contract with one another--an obligation that mutually constitutes their sociality--rather than depend on the articulated inner truth of their intentions, or the received truth of their socialization in institutionalized practices of marriage. In *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress*, Defoe alludes to the individual subject position institutionalized in marriage customs when Roxana exclaims, "the very Nature of the Marriage-Contract was, in short, nothing but the giving up Liberty, Estate, Authority, and every-thing, to the Man, and the Woman was indeed, a meer Woman ever after, that is to say, a Slave" (*Roxana* 148). But Defoe's "fortunate" mistress resolves the contradiction in the civil body, for which the marriage contract is both contributor and figural representation. The Dutch Merchant voices the "resolution" of the contradiction: "a sincere Affection between a Man and his Wife, answer'd all the Objections that [Roxana] had made about the being a Slave, a Servant, *and the like*; and where there was a mutual Love, there could be no Bondage" (149-50). At the very least Mirabell and Millamant's promise suggests that love, too, can be at once a practice of social bonding and individual bondage. But there are more destabilizing implications for the reading of "the social" that Congreve encourages in his critique of traditional subject positions in marriage practices. As Helen M. Burke argues, the attack on marriage is a widespread phenomenon in the late seventeenth century, and "may be part of a more generalized

questioning of symbolic structures” (“Wycherley’s ‘Tendentious Joke’” 227). One instantiation of this socio-symbolic structure placed in question by Congreve’s play is the stability implicit in the reciprocity between public and private patriarchal codes of authority. If in the eighteenth century the patriarchal model of domesticity is a mirror image of the differential, asymmetrical power relation of the king to his society, to alter the “domestic” dimension of the analogy’s signification is, at the very least, to question the necessity of a singular articulation of the domestic-public tropological continuity--and thus, to raise the issue of sedition by way of linguistic detour, through an unvoiced if widely recognizable anagogical correspondence of domestic, civic, and spiritual “order.” In this implicit but no less powerful mode of intervention in the social, Congreve reveals himself, as David Thomas recognizes of Congreve’s dramaturgical output in general, “a shrewd political and social thinker. . . who aligned himself firmly with the radical forces of his age” in his subtle Lockean and, for Thomas, Whiggish insistence on consent and contract “as the basis of civilized social and personal life” (*Congreve* 38). In fact, as we shall see in the contrast between Wollstonecraft and Burke’s reading of the social contract through differing figures of the French Revolution, both Whig and Tory ideologues articulated (competing) forms of “consent” and “contract”; as Ian Balfour notes, in late eighteenth-century England “philosophies of the social contract did and do not always divide neatly along party lines” (“Promises” 225).³² But Congreve’s drama pre-figures

³² Susan Steves had earlier recognized the frequency with which “practical Whigs and Tories agreed on important issues,” and that the fluidity of “political alliances” in the

this instability in interpretative social and teleological categories that becomes, far later in the age, an explicit site for contesting projections of history, memory, the social, and the individual. In his re-scripting of stock formal conventions of “libertine comedy,” Congreve radicalizes the aristocratic element of the tradition from within, but as Canfield asserts, the aristocratic underpinnings of the play prove stubbornly resilient (in this case, largely because Congreve needs to preserve them). But if Congreve does not thematize this political insight, if it remains internal to the language of the play as an enactment of a series of interrelated formal tensions at the level of the text’s structure, we could say that the social context had no need for, could define no utility in, isolating the meaning of this (non)signifying phenomena in an act of denomination, and, further, in specifying interpretative/associative practices by positing that relation of form to itself as a (or an ideological) “contradiction.”³³

Restoration should not be underestimated (*Player’s Scepters* 73). Similarly, as Susan J. Owen writes, before the “Whig/Tory” opposition gained wide currency in 1681, the meaning of the terms in British public life differ as a result of a different political climate (*Restoration Theatre* xi). As she notes, during the Exclusion Crisis, “a single dramatist [for example John Crowne, Behn, Dryden (61-109)] can shift from vehement Toryism to moderation or outright Whiggery and back again within the space of a few years” (6).

³³ Julie Stone Peters interprets this disjunction as the central reason for Congreve’s abandonment of the theatre: if Congreve’s works express the tensions in subject positions occupied by a late seventeenth-century playwright (in which the writer was simultaneously a muse-inspired” poet and a businessman) and which correspond to the schism between an older oral and an emerging print culture. Peters psychologizes Congreve’s formal, dramatic response when she suggests that “he may have felt that a new drama was needed that would marry the two cultures more closely and that he was not capable of such a drama” (*Congreve* 38). Part of the difficulty of seeing this in Congreve’s works is his figuration in eighteenth century studies and culture as the archetype of libertinism. For the extent of

As we shall see in the final chapter, Mary Wollstonecraft adopts this strategy explicitly at the end of the eighteenth century in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. At one point in the text Wollstonecraft conflates the social order imposed by the reification of the two relations of the analogy, public/private, “king” and “woman.” In a discussion of the state of “degradation to which woman is reduced” she ascribes to men the power of unconsciously subverting this “natural” order perpetuated in the structure of language: the “passions of men” have “placed women on thrones” (*VRW* 132). Further she argues for the irrationality of social identities that exclude both (with radically differing results) from the discourse of public rationality, “reason” redefined as the “simple power of improvement” (128): “A King is always a king--and a woman always a woman: his authority and her sex, ever stand between them and rational converse” (132). Beyond the naturality of these designated identities, however, if reason is the “simple power of improvement” it is the ability of “discerning truth” (128). But when “reason” and the simple power of truth are equated, “truth,” too, becomes that produced by, that which unfolds through, the social body. But Wollstonecraft deflects, if she does not wholly eradicate, the element of sedition implicit in Congreve’s revision of the “domestic” rationality that in part works to anchor the “domestic-public” analogy through the maintenance of aspects of chivalric sensibility. In addition to her repeated assertion that her project is the reinstatement rather than the subversion of British social values, she

this trope, see Novak’s “Archetypal Libertine.”

positions Rousseau as the central figure for the continuing dissemination, in the latter eighteenth century, of this metaphorical relation between public and private, she also subtly incites British readers' nationalistic identifications in urging a rejection of the French thinker's misguided constructions of "the social."³⁴ Remarkably, her use of such devices marks the perpetuation of conventional social practices in Britain as *itself* subversive of the "proper" social relations. With this stunning reversal of the analogous relationship between domestic and public categories, the social "order" deconstructs itself from within the performative "logic" of its contradictions. Her critique in *Vindication of the Rights of Men*--which forms the subtext of, and subtends, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*--rests on the aristocratic class's aestheticizing of this public-private relation in various social practices of possession and ownership. From this perspective, the two *Vindications* read like chiasmic presentations of aspects of the same argument, attacking the reason/emotion binary, as well as that binary's intersecting cultural configurations in categories of gender and class, from differing "sides" of the "domestic-public" analogy; this reciprocity in the subject matter of the two works suggests that her writing style and pedagogical strategies are far less "desultory," "associative," or "discontinuous" than most

³⁴ Linda Colley recognizes the circulation of this logic of nationalistic division in the public consciousness of the 1790s, and suggests the imbrication of politico-nationalistic identification with not only a radicalizing but also an apologist rhetoric when she observes that "Pamphleteers, cartoonists, and above all, clergymen summoned up all the threats of pillage, massacre, and rape at the hands of the invading French soldiery" to assert "the twin themes of the peculiar safety of British women and of their danger from the French" (*Britons* 257).

critics recognize--and far more subtle than her declamatory rhetoric suggests initially.

By the end of the century, then, Wollstonecraft would present a more thorough revision of the metaphor and the diversity of social practices it engendered throughout the eighteenth century. For Wollstonecraft this activity is explicitly an act of remembering “the social” across its history. At the beginning of the century, however, Congreve’s opening salvo against the analogy focuses explicitly on the “domestic” element of the metaphorical relation, all but occluding the “public” ramifications of his critique. In contrast to the marriage contract Roxanna laments, the contract that the two equally adept wits (in)formalize *as* their marriage is no less than an obligation to constitute their future as a continual process of subjective inscription and revision. At the centre of the play, then, lies a subtle but radical shift in the foundation of the individual as guarantor of truth, and in the basis for anchoring and perpetuating the social contract (i.e., mutual negotiation as one among a number of possibilities for a construction of “the social” replaces a dominating consciousness as the agent of fixity for a field of social relations and individual identity). After listing a series of names that will too severely restrain the motility of power between them, Millamant words this as follows: “Let us never Visit together, nor go to a Play together, but let us be very strange” (IV.v,407).³⁵ Their agreement about this

³⁵ Congreve’s thought bears strong affinities with Emmanuel Levinas’s work on ethics. As Levinas states in “The Trace of the Other,” “the heteronomous experience...would be an attitude that cannot be converted into a category, and whose movement unto the other is not recuperated in identification.” (*Deconstruction in Context* 348).

“play” between them signals the acceptance of an epistemological position common to humanity; for others, such as Witwoud and Petulant, the lack of agreement leads to increasingly more aberrant forms of attempting to halt the coruscation of projection and reception by the assertion of one’s interpretative power over the other, and thus withdrawing from the circuitousness of any relationship through the attempt to obtain the “literal” interpretation. As Yvonne Shafer indicates, “the audience sees courtship and agreement to marry based on mutual respect and attraction” (47),³⁶ which suggests a shift in the constellation of associations that stabilize relations among concepts like, and social practices of, “equality,” “freedom,” and individual, social, and transcendental “power.”

For Congreve’s characters in *The Way of the World*, equality of wit works by exposing the construction of the presentation of self that is supposed to dupe or disable the one to whom that construction is presented. The displacement of that construction/ presentation of self, by a sally of wit equal to it, reveals that the security of belief in one’s efficacy to dupe, and thus, to define one’s singularity by that ability, is misplaced. Thus, through an equality of wit, truth becomes the performance of truth--the revelation of the “truth” of the other’s actions and intentions turns back upon itself when one wit exposes the conceit of the other’s wit. The idea of a necessarily mediated truth (and the epistemological problem of self-reflexivity it engenders) separates Congreve from the

³⁶ Unlike the reading I present throughout the chapter, Shafer does not differentiate Congreve from other “libertine” dramatists on the self-possession available in “wit.”

majority of dramatists who were his contemporaries. If Congreve refuses to adopt the “reform” conventions surfacing at the time he is writing his plays, he also refuses to focus on the learned or emergent morality of the “hero” as a specific target of satire, as does Vanbrugh in *The Relapse*; rather, he takes the portrait of subjectivity, the construction of individuality, and the (in)ability of self-reflection to reform actions as his subject matter. In Congreve’s aesthetic, to adopt either of the two dramatic forms above is to engender the forgetting of one’s personal complicity before the appearance of truth; it is to forget that, as Scandal puts it in *Love for Love*, “I know no effectual Difference between continued Affectation and Reality” (III.iii,262). Scandal’s denomination is consistent with his statement, and both are consistent with the to and fro movement of coruscation as the scandal of truth: not “lying” but the inability to tell lie from truth, fiction from reality, is the emerging scandal of human existence.

This choice and presentation of subject matter has direct consequences on the development of the plot. Unlike Wycherley’s Horner or Etherege’s Dorimant, Congreve’s Mirabell is not necessarily in control of his own subjectivity. The events of the play question consistently his ability to depend on his reading of the situations in which he finds himself and to manipulate that reading into action that achieves his ends. In effect, the plot continually escapes him; he does little more than set the story in motion. Most of the other characters have their designs included into the unfolding of the story: Mirabell’s plot (and the narrative line of the play) is the motion of a number of characters rather than the motive of one character brought to satisfaction by his own method. In act two scene five,

Millamant reminds him that he has already lost control over where his own plot will travel:

Mira. Can you not find in the variety of your Disposition one moment--

Milla. To hear you tell me *Foible's* Marry'd, and your Plot like to speed--No.

Mira. But how came you to know it-- (374)

We are reminded of the irony of his inability to control the plot that would satisfy his own motives when Foible admits to having erroneously preempted his own use of the information (in the conversation of II.v, as a tool to draw Millamant closer to him): "I told her, Sir, because I did not know that you might find an Opportunity" (II.vii,376).

Similarly, when Mirabell tells Mrs. Fainall the plot, he has no idea that she will graft onto the plot her own ends. Mrs. Marwood also knows the plot and can use it to generate her own story; as she states to Lady Wishfort, "I am sorry my Zeal to serve your Ladiship and Family, should admit of Misconstruction, or make me liable to Affront" (V.iv,426). Even Wishfort, when she receives the letter from Mrs. Marwood, is aware of the plot. All of the characters struggle to affect the self that will give them control over the course the "plot" will take.

The extent of other characters' participation in "Mirabell's" plot is clear in the role that Foible and Waitwell have in it. It is they who enact the plot; they have to draw on their own resources to manipulate the appearance of truth that will allow Mirabell to obtain what he desires. For example, when Wishfort receives the letter from Mrs. Marwood, they must shift the original plan and re-make the plot. Before Mirabell's name appears in Foible's reading of the letter, Foible and Waitwell must adopt a different posture and, by adaptation, fit the event of the disclosure (Mrs. Marwood's reading of the

plot) as well as the original plan to yet another version of the original plot:

Foib. Unfortunate, all's ruin'd.

Wait. How, how, let me see, let me see--reading, *A Rascal and disguis'd, and suborn'd for that Imposture*,--O Villany! O Villany!--*by the Contrivance of*--

Lady. I shall faint, I shall die, oh!

Foib. Say, 'tis your Nephew's Hand.--Quickly, his Plot, swear, swear it.-- [To him.

Wait. Here's a Villain! Madam, don't you perceive it, don't you see it? (IV.xv,419)

The plot escapes Foible, however, and she must use it to defend herself before Lady

Wishfort.

The extent to which the plot can escape any one character's control is also clear when the drunkenness of Sir Wilfull spills into a plot of its own as Petulant and Witwoud also become inebriated:

Mrs. Fainall. He's horridly Drunk--how came you all in this Pickle?

Wit. A Plot, a Plot, to get rid of the Knight,--Your Husband's Advice; but he sneak'd off. (IV.ix,412)

Significantly, this "plot" also leads to Millamant's joke on power: when Wilfull asserts his traditionalist discourse on the relationship of male/female power, Millamant retorts "Your Pardon, Madam, I can stay no longer--Sir *Wilfull* grows very powerful. Egh! how he smells" (IV.x,414).

Given the significant characterization and plot divergences between the plays of Congreve and Wycherley, Congreve and Etherege, and Etherege and Wycherley, it is difficult to read Congreve's drama as a return to, or of, previous formal characteristics; however, his drama does employ certain formal elements of Wycherley and Etherege. For example, his characters continue in the tradition of types, as suggested by their names;

also, there are elements of Loveit in Lady Wishfort, Horner and Harcourt in *Mirabell*, Medley in *Fainall*. The theme of age is not employed explicitly as a means for understanding elements of the action; however, most of the participants are young. In addition, the theme of town and country appears in *The Way of the World*, although Congreve employs the theme of town/country mores as a subtext (Sir Wilfull's relationship to Witwoud) to the central exploration of the problem of subjectivity rather than as a central organizational device that provides a dependable guide for reading character. Congreve suggests the unreliability of the geographical metaphor as an indicator of character when Millamant states, "I loathe the country and every thing that relates to it...I hate the Town too" (IV.iv,404); however, Sir Wilfull, Witwoud, and Petulant are clearly drawn from the conventional stock characters of town/country character organization. If to the literary historian Congreve does not present a simple return to earlier formal and thematic concerns, neither does he represent a complete break from those traditions. Such an understanding of Congreve's drama accounts for Downes' and Dennis's differing readings of the audience's initial reception. By John Downes's account, *The Way of the World* was "curiously Acted...[and] had not the success the company expected." (*Roscius Anglicanus* 95). His next comment is suggestive: in attempting to account for the "failure" of the play he considers it "too keen a Satyr" (95). If we remember the common thread in the theory of satire in the period--that satire was the voiding of experiential categories that yet revealed the truth behind the lie--then Downes would be stating that Congreve's *Way of the World* voided both its own stylistic

precedents and the conventional performative (or affective) meaning of satire itself, to the extent that the audience could not respond. This view of satire rejoins the voiding of experiential categories with Hume's theory of laughter in such a manner that satire loses much of its ability to engender self-reflexivity in the audience. In any case, Downes implies that the nature of the play is the reason for its failure.

A somewhat different account is provided by Dennis, who felt that "it was hiss'd by barbarous Fools in the Acting; and an impertinent Trifle was brought on after it, with vast Applause." (*Works* II 121-22). Dennis's account suggests that the culpability for the failure of the play rests with the tastes of the audience, who refused to follow the play's complexity of characterization. The play would have been considered "curiously acted" precisely because it drew on recognizable, conventional dramaturgical elements, and yet, the mode of characterization was such that one could not depend on the performance conventions--which are also audience members' cognitive and emotive frameworks--to understand the characters or the plot of the play. Significantly, by altering the interpretative framework, by disturbing the associational processes of his audience, Congreve erases the coordinates of interpretation, but he only suggests contours of their reconfiguration.³⁷ He institutes the ground for a forgetting of the coordinates which

³⁷ The crucial problem of the relative influence of censorship laws in the 1790s might go a long way to helping Restoration drama scholars' understand this "openness" of the play. Although critics such as Robert D. Hume ("Change in Comedy") and Rose Zimbardo ("Imitation to Emulation" *Mirror to Nature*) argue for a change from moral culpability to emulation in the Restoration theatre, the extent to which dramatists could themselves embody explicitly this movement is questionable; given the periodic return of

habituate and socialize particular cultural and political associational processes--a foundation of forgetting upon which many of the subsequent eighteenth-century's performances of memory will come to be constituted. The formal problem of *The Way of the World*, and the historical as a problematic form, are not, properly speaking, contradictory until they actually become (and remain) a site for competing projections of a historical telos, as in the case of Wollstonecraft's dramatic re-figuring of writing as itself a mode of memory for the late eighteenth century. Congreve's voiding of categories of interpretation becomes the ground for Wollstonecraft's site of remembrance, a ground whose contours of formation I will sketch through Sterne and Blake.

The relationship among wit, humour, and Truth in Congreve's dramaturgical aesthetic and *The Way of the World* suggests that to understand both the plot and characters according to pre-existing conventions--that is, according to conventions largely external to, if seemingly present in, the drama--is largely to ignore the encounter with the event of its presentation. A return to Gadamer can serve to situate this problem in its rapprochement with history. As he notes, "all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event" (*Truth and Method* 99). This seems to have been Congreve's understanding of the way of the world: neither he in his aesthetic theory nor any character in his final play can claim control over the plot of

censorship (and the penalties for those found guilty of disobeying censorship "laws") in the latter seventeenth century, as well as the general climate of political instability, dramatists were no doubt chary of explicit offense. For an account of censorship in the period, see Calhoun Winton, "Dramatic Censorship."

time's progression. The dialogic situation presents a movement of history that cannot be understood as dialectical: "plot" is not necessarily an inherent progression toward the realization of a unified form. Congreve's preoccupation with the problem of understanding (audience reception) and the novelty of dramatic form is evident in his dedication of *The Way of the World*. In his discussion of Terence, he notes:

The purity of his Stile, the Delicacy of his Turns, and the Justness of his Characters, were all of them Beauties, which the greater Part of his audience were incapable of Tasting: some of the coarsest Strokes of *Plautus*, so severely censur'd by *Horace*, were more likely to affect the Multitude; such, who come with the expectation to laugh at the last Act of a Play, and are better entertain'd with two or three unseasonable Jests, than with the artful Solution of the *Fable*. (337-38)

Following the Gadamerian thrust of my own presentation, Congreve sees the role of his drama as bringing this "play," what I have been calling "the dialogic situation," into the structure, the formal conventions, of the theatre; thus, the spectator should appreciate the "artful Solution of the Fable," given the difficulty of reconciling "play" with structure or form. Similarly, following *The Way of the World's* "logic" of the dialogical formation of the social sphere, the space of the theatre should not necessarily be conceived as a means to represent pre-existing reality: as Congreve's dramaturgical theory suggests, the path to such reality as well as the path to what constitutes individuality--"true humour"--is by no means clear.³⁸ But for those who would claim some control over the plot of history, this

³⁸ To return to Gadamer: "The player [in our case the audience as well as the critic] experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him. This is all the more the case where the game is itself 'intended' as such a reality--for instance, the play which appears as *presentation for an audience*" (109, italics Gadamer).

drama, and theory of dramaturgy, must be a fancy in the extreme sense of that word in

Congreve's time: literally, without reason.

CHAPTER FOUR

What Tristram (K)no(w)se?: The Reader, the Blank Slate of Memory, and Contractual Re-membering of the Social Body in *Tristram Shandy*

“You cry out, he would say, we are a ruined, undone people.--Why?--he would ask...Because we are corrupted...From the neglect, he would answer, of our pence and our halfpence:--Our bank-notes, Sir, our guineas,--nay our shillings, take care of themselves” (*Tristram Shandy* 171).

“The moment *will* is set above reason and justice, in any community, a great question may arise in sober minds in what part or portion of the community that dangerous dominion of *will* may be the least mischievously placed” (6:42)--Edmund Burke in a letter to M. Dupont.

“Matters of no more seeming consequence in themselves than, “*Whether my father should have taken off his wig with his right hand or with his left*,”--have divided the greatest kingdoms, and made the crowns of the monarchs who governed them, to totter upon their heads.--But I need tell you, Sir, that the circumstances with which every thing in this world is begirt, give every thing in this world its size and shape;--and by tightening it, relaxing it, this way or that, make the thing to be, what it is--great--little--good--bad--indifferent or not indifferent, just as the case happens. (*Tristram Shandy*, 187)

Noses and contracts--in both the more meaning-specific, delimited sense of the litigative emplotment of individual agency and the more generalized notion of “the social contract”--may seem initially to make strange bedfellows. And so, in the most profound of senses, they are. What about that epistemologically-challenged figure of folk humour, that staple of Freudian substitutions and sublimations, that oft forgotten work-horse of properly functioning human physiological systems, could serve to illuminate the network of linguistic and inter-personal promises, oaths, curses, and interpretative conventions that constitutes the/a social body? The nose seems self-evident; in a passage in which he

laments the carelessness of “leaving so many openings to equivocal strictures,” Tristram writes, “by the word *Nose*, throughout all this long chapter of noses, and in every other part of my work, where the word *Nose* occurs--I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less” (258). Part of the joke, of course, is that the humble nose has never been accused of being a primary object for grounding knowledge. This word appears to be one of those signifiers that Tristram laments as the source of Toby’s confusion, a word of “little meaning,” (100) whose signatory effects are inconsequential. Tristram’s circular reasoning in the context of a discussion of “equivocal strictures” suggests, however, that the “natural” designation of identity--articulated succinctly in Leibniz’s principle of identity, $A=A$, or, in this case, $Nose=Nose$ --obscures just how the principle of (autonomous) identity itself is a construct, or in this case, how a nose gets constructed *as* Nose. This problem of identity circulates throughout eighteenth-century practices of representation; as Felicity Nussbaum has argued, such terms as “identity,” “self,” “soul,” and “person” were hotly debated issues in eighteenth-century England (*Autobiographical Subject* 38). But the “identity” of the individual also suggests the image of “the social.” Although in *Autobiographical Subject* Nussbaum’s focus is constructions of subjectivity in autobiographical narratives, she recognizes that the “intensity, diversity, and duration” of these contended issues are inseparable from the formation of the social realm (38). Perhaps nowhere else in eighteenth-century writing is this vital link between “individual” and “social” more evident, if seemingly more occluded, than in Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, in which, for example, a privatized

interpretation of “the nose” can move seamlessly into a rumination on the philosophy of history.

Tristram’s play on the principle of identity, then, is not the only sign urging us to re-read the nose: Tristram’s great grandfather and great grandmother’s conversation about “jointure” turns his great grandfather’s nose into the fundamental “hinge” of the social world, the contract which “joins” individual and individual, and, to a significant degree, constructs the social or compels collective action. In this negotiation--which in the context of Tristram’s narrative itself “disjoins,” digresses from, Tristram’s story of his birth--a contract decided upon by the length of a nose is, somewhat inexplicably, featured: as the argument ends, Tristram writes, “My great grandfather was convinced.--He untwisted the paper, and signed the article” (259). Walter, too, in his honouring of the contract and his acceptance of the principle of noses, reveals that the nose is never far from social and legal contracts, which are never far from interpretations of history. In Walter’s reasoning, the Shandy nose acts as a (negative) guarantor of Shandy family history--a history of misfortunes, since the family “had never recovered the blow of my great grandfather’s nose” (261). Walter is that philosopher in Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* whose thought “aims at the correction of our manners, and extirpation of our vices,” but serves “to foster a predominant inclination, and push the mind, with more determined resolution, towards that side, which already *draws* too much, by the bias and propensity of the natural temper” (26). Slawkenbergius’s Tale, too, about one community’s epistemological wrestling with the nose of the stranger,

reveals how answers to questions about the most mundane formations of identity, subjective agency, and the formation of the community by way of a “social contract” are dependent upon the paradox engendered by interpretative acts that are shared to the precise extent that they are disputed. Thus, when considering *Tristram Shandy*, in the spirit of the *Tristrapaedia*’s search for the “original of society,” (466) the reader might find her/himself invited to begin thinking about the operations of formal and informal agreements, guarantors of interpretation, sanctioned persuasions, and de- or specifically-conditionalized futures (for “the contract” is, simultaneously, all of these activities) by asking the seemingly indecorous question, “What’s in a nose?”

Criticism on *Tristram Shandy* is extensive, and any representation of it is bound to fall prey to the pitfalls of representation that attend Walter’s *Tristrapaedia*. Many critics of *Tristram Shandy* have explored the extent of Sterne’s debt to Locke’s empiricism and theories of cognitive association, with some branching off from mainstream eighteenth-century philosophy to uncover Sterne’s place in the tradition of fideistic skepticism and the relation between the body and language in the text.¹ Similarly, scholars have puzzled over

¹ For readings of Sterne’s relation to Locke, see Marco P. Loverso, “Self-Knowledge and the Lockean Self”; Helen Moglen, *Philosophical Irony*; Arnold E. Davidson, “Locke, Hume, and Hobby-Horses”; Ernest Tuveson, “Locke and Sterne”; Sigurd Burkhardt, “‘Tristram Shandy’s’ Law of Gravity,” pp. 62-3; John Traugott, *Tristram Shandy’s World*; Peter Briggs, “Locke’s *Essay* and the Tentativeness of *Tristram Shandy*”; John Vignaux Smyth, “Sterne”; W.G. Day, “Locke May Not be the Key.” For Sterne’s relation to skepticism, see Donald R. Wehrs, “Sterne, Cervantes, Montaigne”; J.T. Parnell, “Swift, Sterne, and the Skeptical Tradition”; Robert L. Chibka, “The Hobby-Horse’s Epitaph.” For the relation of language and the body, see Ross King, “*Tristram Shandy* and the Wound of Language”; Dennis W. Allen, “Sexuality/Textuality in *Tristram*

the mechanics of the plot of *Tristram Shandy*, as well as related issues of the temporal and spatial functioning of Sterne's narrative and its relation to a mid-eighteenth century intellectual and historical context.² Despite this scholarly attention to Sterne's challenging work, scholars have not extrapolated any consistent theory of causality in the social sphere of *Tristram Shandy*. Due perhaps to the daunting nature of Sterne's polyvocal, highly allusive achievement, scholars tend to interpret the text's intensely associative nature--its seemingly endless possibilities for metaphoric creation evident in puns, jokes and other elements of word-play--as little more than the "indeterminacy" of the text, or as a "product" of Sterne's philosophical skepticism. By anchoring my discussion periodically with Sterne's linguistic plays on "the nose," I will read *Tristram Shandy* in the direction Melvyn New identifies as the most promising of recent criticism of *Tristram Shandy*. Building on the work of previous scholars, who have made appear a context of interpretation "separated from novel-centered discussions, from reliance upon Locke as the key to some esoteric coding, and. . . free from the need to see him. . . as a secular sceptic or existentialist" ("Introduction Polemical" 7-8), I will attempt to read Sterne and *Tristram Shandy* against the grain of current interpretative "insights" (8) such that Sterne's work, as itself a historically situated text, can produce a re-reading of current

Shandy"; Frank Brady, "Tristram Shandy": Sexuality, Morality, and Sensibility."

² For example, see K.G. Simpson, "At this Moment in Space"; Elizabeth Livingston Davidson, "Toward an Integrated Chronology"; Morris Golden, "Periodical Context in the Imagined World of *Tristram Shandy*"; Eric Rothstein, "Tristram Shandy"; Mark Loveridge, *Laurence Sterne*.

interpretative assumptions. More specifically, I will attempt a counter-intuitive reading of the construction of the social world in *Tristram Shandy*, an understanding of “the social” in which traditional notions of causality are suspended, but in which causality is not thereby altogether eradicated. Thus, while it provides no easy solution to the problem of its own and the social world’s causal springs, the text does not collapse causality altogether; the relations among subjective agency, social creation, and an ultimate, teleological causality are less “indeterminate” than “re-defined” in Sterne’s text, since *Tristram Shandy* does not foreclose any of these three approaches to understanding human and historical intentionality. I will explore the paradoxical abyss between subjective agency and the principle of causality throughout this chapter in order to suggest ways in which *Tristram Shandy* complicates the relationship between the “individual” and “the social.” But I must first return to the curiously material scene of the accident that is Tristram in order to explore another sense in which we can read Tristram’s nose—as a *mise en abyme* of identity, a making visible of the negation of individuation.

Odd as it may seem, the question of individual and “social” agency of Tristram’s nose *should* surface in the context of a reading of *Tristram Shandy* when we remember that Tristram credits the sum of his “misfortunes”—and thus, his life and the very narrative of his experiences—to the flattening of his nose. But before he makes this statement, he seems to project responsibility for his life onto other, extra-human sources—while at the same time disparaging his relation to the causal spring beyond him. Tristram, in fact, has been all but ignored by “fate” or “Fortune,” who has bequeathed him the lot of civil

irritation and/or social insignificance:

I have been the continual sport of what the world calls Fortune; and though I will not wrong her by saying, She has ever made me feel the weight of any great or signal evil;--yet with all the good temper in the world, I affirm it of her, That in every stage of my life, and at every turn and corner where she could get fairly at me, the ungracious Duchess has pelted me with a set of as pitiful misadventures and cross accidents as ever small HERO sustained (8-9).

Similarly, “the fates” are responsible for establishing “cause and effect” in Toby’s relationship with widow Wadman (673). Although in the passage above he uses language of transcendental causality, a short while later in the narrative Tristram specifies that the actual functioning of cause and effect in his life is far more “mundane.” Curiously, his nose is the liminal site of causality through which he moves from a language of transcendental premeditation to a language of social pre-mediation. In Tristram’s language we can see the nose interpolate its “possessor” into particular emplotments of subjectivity, agency, and social signification. “[W]hat a train of vexatious disappointments, in one stage or other of my life,” Tristram informs us, “have pursued me from the mere loss, or rather compression, of this one single member” (47). Tristram’s foreshortened nose, quashed at birth--at, we might say, the “proper origin” of Tristram’s inclusion in the social structure--leads us rather abruptly to various forms of contracts, since the accidental “creation” of Tristram’s nose becomes not only the site of significant future ramifications, consequences, and deliberations, but also the legacy of a prior contract.

In his recognition of contractual obligations as the cause of his fragmented nose,

Tristram shifts “causality” from an *a priori*, a-temporal source to an *a posteriori* temporal designation, from “fate” to the world of social acts: Tristram discloses that he is “doom’d, by marriage articles,” to have his “nose squeez’d as flat to [his] face, *as if* the destinies had actually spun [him] without one” (46; italics added). But the problems issuing from “causality” by no means end with this simple shift in temporal and spatial location. Walter and Toby’s discussion of Tristram’s nose through the analytico-deductive structure of mathematical probability and the notion of “chance” suggest a similar shift in accounting for causality. As Tristram reports, “What a chapter of chances, said my father...what a long chapter of chances do the events of this world lay open to us!” (336). But this world of “chance” offers no more agency to individuals than does the world of “Fate” or “Fortune”--even if it (potentially) provides insights into socialized versions of causality: “Take pen and ink in hand, and calculate it fairly, brother *Toby*, said my father, and it will turn out a million to one, that of all parts of the body, the edge of the forceps should have the ill luck just to fall upon and break down that one part, which should break down the fortunes of our house with it” (336). The statement contains two premises which appear mutually exclusive in relation to one another: on the one hand, “chance” provides an opportunity for calculating the probability of an event (and thus, represents a means of measuring the grounds for causality in the initial incident that damages Tristram’s nose as well as constituting an assertion of a cause and effect structure in the reasons for the Shandy’s history of misfortune); on the other, both “chance” and “luck” suggest the suspension of human agency. Toward the end of his tale, Slawkenbergius captures this

uneasy duality of eighteenth-century causality in an implied physiological metaphor: “chance...as often directs us to remedies as to *diseases*” (322). At the very least, throughout *Tristram Shandy* causality and subjective agency appear considerably discontinuous. In Tristram’s representation of his own position, too, the descriptive language suggests that the “nose” subverts his own agency, and re-writes his life in cumulative chains of other, predominantly social and contractual significations, for Tristram’s nose passes, and passes him, through the inter-personal and, at the same time, abstract process of social adjudication. It assumes a peculiar agency in his experiences; like Gogol’s visionary proboscis, Tristram’s “nose” assumes a life of its own, a life that Tristram must, in a markedly literal sense, somehow understand *as* the narrative of his own experiences. Tristram’s nose, if we are willing to meditate upon it, reveals that Tristram’s life is produced outside of Tristram, as it were. Thus, it is no accident that his life story is a serial construction, and series of constructions, of *other* characters, that he comes to write an autobiography through biography, and vice versa. In its crossing of such genre distinctions, too, Tristram’s narrative suggests that “his” life comes from a source or sources outside of himself, his jurisdiction, his agency. And in the broadest of senses, his narrative itself is, in large part, a “causal accounting” for the social context in which he comes to his life as well as a recognition of limitations in the scope of his (and many others’) individual agency.

Curiously, given the decidedly impenetrable causality of his narrative, shortly after an acknowledgement of his powerlessness before his fate, Tristram issues a promise, a

kind of contract of interpretation with the reader: the obscure causality that forms and rules his life “shall be laid before the reader all in due time” (47). In light of Tristram’s powerlessness to alter his life conditions, this claim in a narrative of “accidental” associations runs the danger of functioning as a socially accepted form of *post hoc* reasoning: linking wildly contingent events through narrative devices, Tristram seems to derive a series of causal relations from a temporal sequence. On a meta-narrative level, the “autobiographical” narrative necessarily assigns a belated causal sequence to the fortuitous events which form the temporal sequence of its subject’s life, and thus, narrative would perform a reclamation of the individual’s lost agency from the fragmentation of the individual in “his” or “her” history. This possibility is applicable particularly to a text like *Tristram Shandy*, which takes as its object the fortuitous, or, more accurately, the disparate process of “association” both in “history” and in the “mind.” Implicit in this critical argument is the assumption that causality is an empty signifier; full of sound and fury, “causality” figures nothing more than desire for control in the text of history as well as in a literary text like *Tristram Shandy*. But to dispense with Tristram’s narrative power through recourse to the brilliant self-reflexivity of the narrative seems a dubious, and disingenuous, critical strategy. This assumption would also throw out the critical baby with the causal bathwater, Tristram’s nose with Tristram’s life. If causality is not the property, as it were, of any one individual in the text--and we have already seen that very “fragmentation” of agency form the lovers’ contract of “perpetual interpretation” in Congreve’s *Way of the World*--it is less than logical to conclude that no cause and effect

structures are evident in Tristram's life. Instead, we should ask what historical purpose so radical an introduction of discontinuity between individuality and causality serves. Or we could seek other, less well-travelled associative paths for interpreting agency: if "causality" and "the individual" are, in significant ways, de-synonymized, how is it that "the individual" comes to its agency? Or a perhaps far more difficult question arises: in what obscure processes of association, and on what blanketed slate of memory, is the link between what I will call "individuation" and agency stored? If "individuation" is the process of constructing socially recognized parameters for subjectivity, the discursive practices that constitute subjectivity must be recovered in the act of re-reading processes of memory. In "The Hobby-Horse's Epitaph: *Tristram Shandy*, *Hamlet*, and the Vehicles of Memory," Robert L. Chibka considers the entire text of *Tristram Shandy* as a conflicted process of memory. For Chibka, Tristram's "most pressing need" is to "remember whence he came, however distracted by proliferant narrative responsibilities"; at the same time, however, Tristram "must satisfy his primary need--to forget himself" (149). Chibka focuses on the "problem" of memory in Tristram's complicated act of remembering "himself"; it is beyond the scope of his essay to analyse the effects of such a re-orientation of memory in its social operations. If Tristram's narrative is a "paradoxical vehicle of memorialization," then his text suggests that memory as it has been heretofore understood constructs a simplistic causal link between subject and object, subjectivity and "the social." In Tristram's re-interpretation of memory, then, there is more at stake for Sterne and his contemporary audience than the cognitive functioning of a single fictional

character. If Sterne's complex re-figuring of operations of memory is a more "accurate" construction of memory's functioning, why--and by what social processes--is the "memory" of what Sterne "recovers" made blank? How to recall its traces in the eighteenth-century social world?

From the onset of Tristram's "misfortunes," Sterne suggests that the many forms of the social contract--the modes and medium of interpretation and communication that produce the social body--are both more and less than the sum of their parts. The contract that Sterne submits to the reader is less one of upsetting narrative conventions, negating causality, or frustrating the reader's acceptance of the "social contract" than it is an invitation to unprecedented forms of self-reflexivity. At the same time, if Tristram (k)no(w)se nothing here, he yet produces the narrative not only of his own but also others' lives--he does, in other words, engage and "enact" the social contract, if not quite in the manner described by such recognizable eighteenth-century pioneers of social contracts as Jean Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* and, later, William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. But Tristram's nose, if I can mix metaphors, is at the heart of a series of re-orientations of individualized agency, the epistemological "law" of the contract that becomes synonymous with processes of interpretation, and the constructing of (the)social world(s). And so the lugubriously infelicitous, certainly far too material question of "what's in a nose?" may serve to take us across that space too abruptly foreshortened by many scholars' recent focus on the onto-theological, teleological designation of "history," which in much postmodern discourse is "understood" to be a

foundation for eighteenth-century notions of social “being.”

If Tristram’s narrative suggests alternatives to, rather than wholly denies, traditional emplotments of causality and “the subject” in relation to cause and effect structures, we need to clarify those basic aspects of Sterne’s narrative mode that can re-orient our inquiry. The “contract” is perhaps the most significant social site for re-orienting “causality” and “the subject,” since it is through the structure of contractual obligations that “subjects” make visible their autonomy, and exercise their “birth-right” as intentional, causal agents--in the traditional sense, as the producers of their own history. But Tristram’s involvement with contracts provides a different story of the principle of identity and the “causal” individual. Across the web of seemingly infelicitous narrative movements between the nose that is not and the legally binding contractual obligation, and *that* legal securing of action (if not agency) between Tristram’s parents and the interpretative contract enacted in the construction of reader/writer relations (Tristram’s promise), Tristram sets out what is perhaps the central preoccupation of the text: *how* the curious or banal, absent or obscure, literal or figural, relationship between or among two or more seemingly disparate entities actually/ historically occurs in his life. Of this process of association Tristram states: “Beings inferior...syllogize by their noses...The gift of doing it as it should be, amongst us...is the finding out the agreement or disagreement of two ideas one with another...” (281). The interpretative negotiations that produce--fortuitously in most cases--particularized relationships between or among objects are the means by which the social body--and with it, the subjectivities of the characters who

interact to construct “the social”--is created (and continually recreated).

But this is not all that is at stake in the process of “association”: the relations between subject and object, too, must be re-thought, since re-structuring the associations that produce relations between and among objects is also a re-structuring of the relationship of causality and (subjective) agency. Yorick’s predicament is shared by all characters in the text: “...there is a fatality attends the actions of some men: Order them as they will, they pass thro’ a certain medium which so twists and refracts them from their true directions--that, with all the titles to praise which a rectitude of heart can give, the doers of them are forced to live and die without it” (24). Sterne deliberately blurs the distinction between causality and subjective agency; in fact, he questions attributions of agency to the “individual” subject to such an extent that his text effects a radical transformation of the relation between “individual” and “social,” and suggests processes of individualization and individuation at work in the most unassuming linguistic and social designations of identity. For Sterne, “the individual” is a trope of causality. How, exactly, can we understand such a statement with reference to *Tristram Shandy*? We need to follow up on the other “question” Tristram leaves us: “[w]hy the most natural actions of a man’s life should be call’d his Non-Naturals. . .” (84). But if the critique of “the individual” is a great deal more of a preoccupation for Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* than many scholars have recognized, Sterne’s text is not necessarily, as Elizabeth Wanning Harries also argues in *Unfinished Manner*, the outgrowth of a boundless “skepticism or

solipsism”³ (53) brought about by the disturbance of anagogical ordering systems. His thorough problematizing of “knowledge” in its varied forms and practices is a critique driven by a scepticism directed at *discursive forms* of human causality (and, consequently, at a host of linguistic and “material” relations which that causality traditionally underwrites); by complicating these discursive forms, by re-reading their unquestioned emplotment in associative chains, Sterne re-positions not only individuality and agency, but also “history” and “memory.”

If we can see how Sterne refigures history and memory in relation to his re-interpretation of processes of cognitive association, we can begin to understand the full import of his obsession with de-naturalized noses--that is, with “the nose” as a means for making visible two inter-related constructions that the action of the social world makes invisible: the negation of the process of naturalizing identity, and the “process of individuation,” the making of the individual subject *for* society in a social contract that uses the individual as the locus for causality/agency. In order to explore these two operations of “identity” in light of Sterne’s “history” and “memory,” it may prove fruitful to consider briefly some of the details of Everett Zimmerman’s suggestive analysis of *Tristram Shandy*. In “‘Tristram Shandy’ and Narrative Representation,” Zimmerman refers to another metaphor for speaking about a visible absence in the text: Tristram’s visit to the tomb of the two lovers. For Zimmerman, the “absent tomb” is an “absence visible

³ Harries distances her reading of *Tristram Shandy* from that of Earl Wasserman’s influential study, *The Subtler Language*. For Wasserman’s account see esp. 169-71.

only to the consciousness already engaged by it” and, as such, is “a suitable icon for *Tristram Shandy*’s view of history” (119). In his reading of the novel’s meditation on, and mediation of, history through the metaphor of the lovers, “the historical is brought into being by the consciousness that is able to create it, and it is lost when imagination fails” (119). Two aspects of this reading are particularly striking: first, Zimmerman’s emphasis on the historical as a product of a single consciousness quite rightly suggests a collapse, in *Tristram Shandy*, of the distinction between (objective) “history” and its (subjective) complement and counterpart, “memory,” a “collapse” that is observed as a matter of course throughout much eighteenth-century writing and thought. Developing one of Sterne’s concise formulations for this imbrication of memory and history, Zimmerman asserts that Locke’s *Essay* is a history of “what passes in a man’s own mind” (II.ii; 85, 98) just as are “all histories as well as all essays” (119). Here, Zimmerman’s focus on “history” as a construct of “imagination,” and his conclusion that the failure of history is a “failure of imagination,” imposes a distinctly nineteenth-century language and category of interpretation upon a work of predominantly eighteenth-century thought (even if that work self-consciously calls into question much of that thought). Secondly, and a direct consequence of a “romantic” interpretation of *Tristram Shandy*’s questioning of “history,” this language imposes a distinction between “the individual,” or the individual’s powers of creation, and the collective action through and, as often, against which such individuality would exercise itself. Certainly, *Tristram* suggests in a myriad of ways--most famously in his tracing of the genealogies of events produced by mis-understood “hobby-horses”--that

personal styles of interpretation problematize not only the possibility that a knowledge of “history” can be shared, but also communication or communicability itself. Equally insistent in the text, however, are Sterne’s suggestions that Tristram is not his own keeper--that, more pointedly, others form Tristram’s very individuality and that in part Tristram is, beyond his identity as writer of the text in which they appear, the producer of others’ subjectivities.⁴ Clearly, to re-read the relation between “memory” and “history” in Sterne’s text is also to question the customary associations among language, subjectivity, and causality; and Sterne’s revision of the figure “memory” is essential to his probing of commonplace associations among language, subjective agency, and causality.

The language of Zimmerman’s analysis suggests that subjective “memory,” in its constructive proximity to “imagination,” actually takes precedence over “history” in its ability to formalize time. Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* bears out the proximity of “imagination” and “memory” in eighteenth-century formulations of subjective identity across time. For Hume, “memory not only discovers the identity [of an object or subject], but also contributes to its production, by producing the relation of resemblance among perceptions” (I.4.6). But Sterne’s text takes this conflation of “memory” and “history” much further than a simple reversal of “subjective” and objective” designations; as

⁴ Thus, I would also re-orient K.G. Simpson’s remark, in “At this Moment in Space: Time, Space, and Values in *Tristram Shandy*,” that Sterne foresees Romantic individualism, but “also identifies its limitations” (142). My analysis will concern itself less with the “limitations” of a Romantic ideology than with the means whereby that nascent ideology itself contributes to an intersubjective construction of the individual in Sterne’s text.

Zimmerman also suggests, Sterne imbricates “memory” and “history” to a far greater degree than many of his contemporaries. Explicitly and implicitly, he probes the figurality of commonplace assumptions about memory in the philosophical tradition. Through adaptations of textual passages in Descartes and Locke, for example, Sterne parodies the well-wrought metaphors for memory and the association of ideas. Frank Brady has identified the “mind-body analogy” between Sterne’s parody of the Cartesian pineal gland and sexual processes of the individual body (“Sexuality, Morality” 83). Similarly, when Tristram explains the “cause of obscurity in simple ideas,” Sterne re-works Locke’s slight re-positioning of the long-standing construct for memory in the philosophical tradition. In the language of Locke’s *Essay*,

The *cause of Obscurity* in simple *Ideas*, seems to be either dull Organs; or very slight and transient Impressions made by the Objects; or else a weakness in the Memory, not able to retain them as received. For to return again to visible Objects, to help us apprehend this matter. If the Organs, or Faculties of Perception, like Wax overhardned with Cold, will not receive the Impression of the Seal, from the usual impulse wont to imprint it; or, like Wax of a temper too soft, will not hold it well, when it is imprinted; or else supposing the Wax of a temper fit, but the Seal not applied with a sufficient force, to make a clear Impression: In any of these cases, the print left by the Seal, will be *obscure*. (II, xxix, 3, 363-64)

Locke recognizes the importance of the tropological dimension of his philosophical language when he marks a transition from denotative, philosophical language to its illustration in a figure drawn from “visible Objects”; but he attempts to circumvent a rumination on tropological language with his closing sentence: “This, I suppose, needs no application to make it plainer” (364). Sterne uses the metaphoric properties of language

to unseat the most habitual patterns of cognitive association; his method is to develop what remains implicit in “philosophical,” religious, and legal rhetoric. Thus, language becomes an important tool for unseating a certain form of the collusion of memory and forgetting in eighteenth-century theories of language.

Because the functioning of language is one of the central concerns of Locke’s *Essay*, Locke is on some level aware that the use of figural language is itself an “application.” His form of “awareness”—his use of language to “forget” or exclude a dimension of its metaphorical properties—is a common strategy in eighteenth-century theories of language.⁵ For example, Book Three of *Essay* investigates the possibility of a semiotic systematization for understanding language uses. Similarly, Locke would have been aware of Hobbes’ thoughts on the independence of language from human intentional structures of meaning. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes suggests control over language is both an impossible task for memory and an endless labour of associative ordering: “...a man that seeketh precise *truth*, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for; and to place it accordingly; or else he will find himselfe entangled in words...” (28). Walter’s dictum that every word in the dictionary should be conjugated is an exhaustive attempt to satisfy the conditions evident in Hobbes’ theory of linguistic truth. As Walter develops this idea, “every word...by this means...is converted into a thesis or an hypothesis;— every

⁵ In *English Literature in History*, John Barrell points to another inconsistency in Locke’s theory of language: in the shift between “common” and “philosophical” language, the authority of grounding language use, although implied to be the result of social custom, tends to fall to “the consent of substantial owners of property” (118).

thesis and hypothesis have an offspring of propositions;--and each proposition has its own consequences and conclusions" (492). But Walter implicitly recognizes the infinitude of the task: every conclusion and consequence "leads the mind on again, into fresh tracks of enquiries and doubtings" (492). As Toby recognizes, "'Tis enough...to burst [the mind] into a thousand splinters" (492).

Clearly, if Sterne is preoccupied with the functioning of language throughout *Tristram Shandy*, he is by no means alone in the eighteenth-century linguistic debates which attempt to dispel the more troubling aspects of language. Although more sceptical of Toby's interpretation of language, George Berkeley also would avoid the tangled nest of words: in *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge*, he is aware of the potential dichotomy of language and "meaning" (by which is usually meant human intentionality), but will "be sure to get clear of all controversies purely verbal" by adopting two related strategies (7). In the introduction to *The Principles* Berkeley finds such problems of language use the central impediment to human growth: the intellectual argument over subtle gradations of linguistic meaning are disagreements over the "purely verbal...the springing up of which weeds. . .has been the main hindrance to the growth of true and sound knowledge" (7). His remedy: to strip words of their clothing, to "take them bare and naked into. . .view," and to relinquish the use of "those names which long and constant use hath so strictly united with [thoughts]" (7). He will "divest" his ideas from his words (7); but *The Principles* returns repeatedly to the obscure or, in Berkeley's oxymoronic construction, the inconsequential meaning of words, and the meaning that

escapes words. As he concedes, “the attainment of all these advantages doth presuppose an entire deliverance from the deception of words, which I dare hardly promise myself” (7).

William Warburton’s *The Divine Legation of Moses* reveals what is at stake in these markedly similar theories of language, since *Divine Legation* is highly suggestive in its articulation of a teleological philosophy of (linguistic) history that subtends these theories of language⁶; in contrast to Warburton’s reinscription of a subject in control of its signifying practices, Sterne’s revision of “memory” takes on added significance. In the second volume of *The Divine Legation*, Warburton undertakes an elaborate historical and theological account of the relation between meaning and words. Employing the same metaphors as Berkeley, Warburton unself-reflexively distinguishes verbal ideas and linguistic excess (by which he means tropes); the latter become signs for human desire: “. . . it has ever been the way of Man, both in speech and *Writing*, as well as in *Clothes* and *Habitations*, to turn his Wants and Necessities into Parade and Ornament” (148). But Warburton provides a historical teleology of the development of obscure representation in linguistic communication. A case in point is Egyptian linguistic semiology which, as in the art of writing, in the *Art of Speaking* Men began to adorn those Modes of Information. . . with Tropes

⁶ For different aspects of Sterne’s and Warburton’s interpretative divergences, see Jonathan Lamb’s “The Job Controversy, Sterne, and the Question of Allegory”; Melvyn New, “Sterne, Warburton”; Zimmerman, “‘Tristram Shandy’ and Narrative Representation,” pp. 112-17.

and Figures, 'till at length Posterity began to doubt about the Original of all *Figurative Expression*; but the *first*, like the *latter*, owed its Birth to mere Want and Rusticity; that is, a *Want of Words*, and a *Rusticity of Conception* (146).

Metaphor arises from the latter, due to an insufficiency in the development of abstract ideas: "The first simple Ages, uncultivated and immersed in Sense, could express their Conceptions of abstract Ideas, and the reflex Operations of the Mind, only by material Images" (147). In Hegelian terminology, "the form," though insufficient representation of the "Idea," (synonymous with the true path of history) *is* an adequate reflection of the content. Paradoxically, Egyptian language *does* fulfill Warburton's essential requirement for meaning transmission in a linguistic medium, the faithful reflection of "thing" by "word," and it does so more accurately than contemporary British language use: Warburton's linguistic/semiotic teleology is figured as the re-membering of history so that his contemporaries can re-orient the path their history has taken.⁷ But if Egyptian linguistic communication begins with the wrong meaning and ends with a language that accurately reflects this problem, the British enunciative subject begins with true meaning and ends with the wrong language for its representation. In other words, whereas the

⁷ More recently, aspects of this operation of memory as a means for recovering a more authentic unfolding of history have been adopted by a number of the proponents of the Frankfurt School, particularly Horkheimer, Marcuse, and the earlier texts of Adorno. For these thinkers, social emancipation from reification is the recovery of lost consciousness through the writer's uncovering of the form of forgetting that constitutes ideology and its institutionalized practice of a "remembering" that is constituted on a form of ideologically-sanctioned forgetting, "reification." The remembering of a history no longer visible in the pervasive ideology of instrumental rationality characteristic of late capitalism; the critic's job is to recover this alternative "lost" or "forgotten" history.

Egyptian language reveals that the Egyptian subject is not endowed with the mechanism of meaning that would secure her/him as adequate casual agents for (teleological) history, the British language reveals that the British subject *is*, but must revise particular aspects of the way in which language produces associations of meaning. This revision would restore to the language user her/his agency in, and over, contemporary language “habits.”⁸

Such a multiplicity of predominantly similar linguistic theories--and Sterne’s revision of tropological language as meaningful--reveal that the relation between language and meaning transmission is problematic precisely because *all* language can “mean,” and thus, produce social effects, to the extent that it can seem to intend an intelligibility *as much as “the individual.”* Human agency, consent, and obligation are jeopardized in proportion to the degree to which tropes can produce meaning-effects outside human perception and intentionality. In the establishment of such a relationship, the social contract in which the “freely consenting individual” is assumed not only can itself be misread, but also, in a very different sense, *must* be misread very precisely in order to remain “the social contract”: it is imperative that the individual retain control over language. Perhaps more tellingly, “the individual” must subordinate the inalienable agency of language if “the subject” is to claim (subjective) agency as its property. Berkeley states

⁸ Barrell alludes to the cultural superiority imbedded in many eighteenth-century theories of language: a “source of ideas for writers on language practice anxious to stress the supremacy of ‘custom’ in matters of correct usage” was the implicit assumption that “the British were. . . *by nature* the most tenacious” pursuants of liberty “among all the civilized nations” (*English Literature* 119).

most explicitly the consequences of this reciprocal relation for a theory of language: if tropes are the active portion of language and can be isolated, then meaning is passive. As Berkeley puts it, “All our ideas, sensations, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive; there is nothing of power or agency included in them” (12). Just as tropes are simply the vehicle of ideas, ideas are simply the *vehicle* of human intention, and, therefore, both subject to and the register of subjective agency in being made active. But language, as J. L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, and others have recently reminded us (and Sterne likewise informed his readers), has considerable performative power beyond individual intentionality--whether “intentionality” is thought as a transcendental figure or as a social, phenomenological “intent of subjective consciousness.” Once this power is acknowledged, once it is even posited, “the individual” and “language” are structured into a particular causal relation: one needs the other as its condition of causal performance, like tain and mirror, respectively. But this process in Sterne’s text differs from “polysemy” whose current Bakhtinian associations of licence, holiday, or inversion of the social hierarchy suggest a temporary suspension of agency/causality rather than a de-naturalized if continuous network of cause and effect. In other words, Sterne’s revision of individual agency and its relation to the construction of “the social” does not imply that “the social” produced by his characters’ (mis)interpretations is a historical interstice; because the language of *Tristram Shandy* always produces events it is not “an eruption” into, and disruption of, the social sphere. Rather, this process *constructs* the social in *Tristram Shandy*. The problem of

understanding that Sterne presents is less “lost” meaning than too often “found” meaning, less suspended agency than re-directed (de-subjectivized) causal “agents.” Speech acts form “the social”; yet, the subject cannot “keep” his/her word.

Locke’s circumlocution of certain linguistic operations in his own text--as well as Hobbes, Berkeley, and Warburton’s varied operations of “memory” that efface the figural element of language--is central to Sterne’s re-reading of “memory.” In Sterne’s representation of the metaphor a simple chambermaid (Betty) literalizes the “plainness” of Locke’s trope and parodies the oversimplification of memory produced by Locke’s language (and by extension, the long-standing metaphor for memory in the tradition of philosophy). That Locke found the trope of wax and seal coextensive with memory--transparent in its transmission of the meaning and operation of memory--is clear in the sentence with which he closes this passage: his role is one of transmission; he reproduces unquestioningly a metaphor inherited from the philosophical tradition from Plato and Aristotle, through St. Augustine to Descartes. In fact, the repetition of the figure throughout the long tradition of speculative philosophy and into British empiricism works to naturalize its further repetition. But Sterne’s parody not only historically materializes, particularizes, Locke’s assumption of the self-evident or unproblematic meaning-effect produced by the trope (and quite pointedly suggests that the reader’s habitual, ritualized understanding of both Locke’s text and the limitation of the associations in the metaphor is misplaced); it also presents self-consciously the trivializing simplicity of Locke’s implicit reliance on the transparency of figural operations, and, more generally, on a theory of

language that fails to question the presumption that language acts as mere medium for the transmission of meaning, that fails to understand that the rhetorical element of language can temper, conflict with, even over-ride, the logical nature of “association” or intentional message of communication. Sterne’s long passage draws attention to the absurdly literal “plainness” of its distended figural gestures at the same time that it suggests a distinction between language as no more than a vehicle for meaning and language as a mode of positing reality. As Tristram words the exchange:

Pray, Sir, in all the reading which you have ever read, did you ever read such a book as *Locke’s* Essay upon the Human Understanding?--Don’t answer me rashly,--because many, I know, quote the book, who have not read it,--and many have read it who understand it not...it will be found that the cause of obscurity and confusion, in the mind of man, is threefold.

Dull organs, dear Sir, in the first place. Secondly, slight and transient impressions made by objects when the said organs are not dull. And, thirdly, a memory like unto a sieve, not able to retain what it has received--Call down *Dolly* your chambermaid, and I will give you my cap and bell along with it, if I make not this matter so plain that *Dolly* herself shall understand it as well as *Malbranch*.--When *Dolly* has indited her epistle to *Robin*, and has thrust her arm into the bottom of her pocket hanging by her right side;--take that opportunity to recollect that the organs and faculties of perception, can, by nothing in this world, be so aptly typified and explained as by that one thin which *Dolly’s* hand is in search of.--Your organs are not so dull that I should inform you--’tis an inch, Sir, of red seal-wax.

When this is melted and dropp’d upon the letter, if *Dolly* fumbles too long for her thimble, till the wax is over-harden’d, it will not receive the mark of her thimble from the usual impulse which was wont to imprint it. Very well: If *Dolly’s* wax, for want of better, is bees-wax, or of a temper too soft,--tho’ it may receive,--it will not hold the impression, how hard soever *Dolly* thrusts against it; and last of all, supposing the wax good, and eke the thimble, but applied thereto in careless haste, as her Mistress rings the bell;--in any one of these three cases, the print, left by the thimble, will be as unlike the prototype as a brass-jack. (I.ii.ii, 98-9)

As one example among a number of similar episodes in which Tristram logically extends the signifiatory effects of figures, the passage indicates Sterne’s heightened

awareness of the complexity of figural operations: at the very least, the metaphor of memory is re-contextualized in the lived conditions of class relations.⁹ On this level of its functioning, Sterne suggests that the figure for memory itself is the occasion for a forgetting of the material density of a lived set of social relations. Implicit in this re-writing of “memory,” too, is a probing of the connection between predominant theories of language and the effects of ideality and ideology to which such theories contribute.

But Sterne develops explicitly problems of elided memory at the level of a theory of language. For Tristram as for other characters in the novel, the tropological functioning of language is a preoccupation. For example, Tristram acknowledges that Toby’s life “was put in jeopardy by words” (101). Toby’s rumination on the *mot juste*--on the proper word to establish the precise associative relationship between word and thing for a particular social context--is a case in point:

My sister, mayhap, quoth my uncle *Toby*, does not choose to let a man come so near her****” Make this a dash,--’tis an Aposiopesis.--take the dash away, and write Backside,--’tis Bawdy.--Scratch Backside out, and put *Cover’d-way* in,--’tis a Metaphor;--and, I dare say, as fortification ran so much in my uncle *Toby*’s head, that if he had been left to have added one word to the sentence,--that word was it. (116)

Toby is attentive not only to the relation of word to existential “reality,” but also to the

⁹ Burkhardt notes that Sterne’s parody follows “Locke’s conditions for clarity and truth,” but ultimately reveals that “words, unlike ideas, have body.” Following Sterne’s allusive sexualizing of seemingly inert words, Burkhardt argues that the body/word is “an almost continuous” unveiling of the predominance of the body over reason (“Law” 63). Burkhardt, in concert with a number of other scholars of Sterne, marks the nose, whiskers, sausages, bridges, chestnuts, and a host of other signifiers as largely interchangeable terms that collapse the distinction between words and body, ideas and physical matter.

linguistic relation established between word and word--to the semiology of tropes, the manner in which language speaks about language, and how the "speaking" of the inter-relation of tropes constructs modes of association; in this case, how language choice can construct his sister's "character" in the social sphere. Walter sees an extra-subjective causal mechanism in denomination: "there was a strange kind of magick bias, which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impress'd upon our characters and conduct" (57-8). Walter's theory of naming--"How many CAESARS and POMPEYS...by mere inspiration of the names, have been render'd worthy of them" (58)--not only attributes a performative power to the assignation of the proper name, but also designates to language a historical (and subjective) agency. The injury perpetrated by the careless denomination "could never be undone"; in fact, the reversal of the "history" that attaches to the (im)proper name cannot be accomplished by the appointed legislative body of the social contract: "he doubted even whether an act of parliament could reach it" (62). Similarly, Walter's power of persuasion in the present depends upon the seamlessess of rhetoric and logic: as Tristram says, "Persuasion hung upon his lips, and the elements of Logick and Rhetorick were so blended up in him...that NATURE might have stood up and said,-- 'This man is eloquent'" (60). For both characters, however, language constructs the world based upon the habitual train of associations in their linguistic memories, which, as Toby makes clear, are also designations in and of the social world.

Lingusitic memory becomes social history, but this is not the end of the story of linguistic production, nor the final resting place of causality. Significantly, Walter's

attempt to relieve Toby's confusion about the meaning of "analogy"--which is a justifiable uncertainty about the way in which ideas, words, and entities are brought into relation *as* trains of associations--serves only to relive his sense of the accidental, indeterminate relations already established among objects of thought. When Toby declares "I never understood rightly the meaning of that word," Walter's response is cut short by the unforeseen action characteristic of the social world: "--ANALOGY, replied my father, is the certain relation and agreement, which different--Here a Devil of a rap at the door snapp'd my father's definition..." (118). Walter and Toby's confusions are "failures"--of linguistic memory, of the imagination--only in the sense that human intentionality is not a guarantor of meaning-effects in language. This is not to suggest that human intentionality is "fated" to fail; rather, human plans can equate action with a desired outcome, as the case of the widow Wadman's success with Toby makes clear. But in Tristram's descriptions of Widow Wadman's machinations, the capacity of language to make intentionality an unstable performance is more often (humourously) equated with the accidental effects of violence: "nonsense it is, either in fighting, or writing, or any thing else...which a man has occasion to do--to act by plan: for if ever Plan, independent of all circumstances, deserved registering in letters of gold...it was certainly the PLAN of Mrs. Wadman's attack of my uncle *Toby* in his sentry-box" (704-05). In essence, the outcome that is produced exactly according to "plan" is as much a fortuituous event as the accident that disrupts "intentional" behaviour. This construction is a perversely logical outcome of locating agency in "the individual": causality becomes the sign for the unpredictable, or

bears the sign of an accidental associative chain. Thus, even in the case of Wadman's "success," adaptation to circumstances produces a result coincident with her desire, since she exercises a certain "genius"--the faculty that produces the fortuitous *just so*--in forming "a new attack in a moment" (705). Sterne suggests repeatedly that the grounding of causality in language *must* remain open, and further, that the process of forming "analogies" blurs the distinction between "linguistic" and "social" reality, rhetorical and substantive effects. In *The Principles*, Berkeley neatly expresses this insight: "the connection of ideas does not imply the relation of *cause* and *effect*, but only of a mark or *sign* with the thing *signified*...the reason why ideas are formed into machines, that is, artificial and regular combinations, is the same with that for combining letters into words" (20). As a linguistic process of delineating a pattern of relationship, analogy is only another, if different, word for the process of association. The "explanation" of its functioning must come in the crossing of linguistic "analogy" and experiential "association" in an entirely literal sense, from the "action" it accomplishes, the a-conscious "work" of the social world. In the latter sense of the functioning of tropes--as figures able to operate beyond either individual or social intentionality--language *continuously* produces effects of subjectivity outside the agency of any enunciating subject(s). For precisely this reason, Toby agonizes over the representation of his sister and the causes of his war wound; similarly, all of Walter's impeccable logic and linguistic fecundity cannot explicate adequately the performative achievements of the social "context." The question of the functioning of "analogy," which is nothing less than the question of how to name

the operations of analogy,¹⁰ must be voiced and adjudicated repeatedly in the social world; but by no means does Sterne suggest that this question is, in its fragmentation of the epistemological “answer,” merely a hortatory gesture. It is also a performance of the “social” in the following sense: it forces definition upon the associations that contour the social body, and allows for the inter-subjective re-definition of causality, agency, and subjectivity.

If the effects of language cannot be divided with any precision along a logic/rhetoric axis, neither can “linguistic” memory be separated from a memory composed of “ideas” from the sensory world (as Locke would attempt to assert). In fact, the difference between Walter’s all too often misplaced assurance with language and Toby’s “failure” with and in it, is that Toby at all times remains aware of the indivisibility of the merely rhetorical effect and the logical transmission of meaning or intent. In fact, the characters reveal a fascination with effects of oration: gesture, timbre--or, as Roland

¹⁰ This question persists in contemporary scholarship, most notably in those theorists of sentimentality who investigate physiological and moral transference in models of sentimentality. For example, in the context of discourses of sentimentality, James Rogers argues that “analogy” is essentially “a shared language.” In, Anne Jessie Van Sant uses the term to describe a relationship of “coincidence between the rhetoric of pathos and scientific presentation” In Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*, Yorick bridges these two overlapping rhetorics of sentimentality when he notes, “There is a pleasing half guilty blush, where the blood is more in fault than the man--‘tis sent impetuous from the heart, and virtue flies after it--not to call it back, but to make the sensation of it more delicious to the nerves-.” In this representation of the functioning of sentimentality, it remains difficult to differentiate the physiological mechanics of morality from the moral mechanics of physiology: Yorick’s account of the process collapses the autonomy of the two terms, and suggests that the relation between them is less one of an “analogy” between two distinct systems than of a mutually constitutive and sustaining tension.

Barthes puts it, “the grain of the voice.” Barthes states the difference between “timbre” and “grain” with reference to how the voice “signifies” in music: “the ‘grain’ of the voice is not--or is not merely--its *timbre*; the *significance* it opens cannot better be defined than by the very friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and nowise the message)” (*Image-Music-Text*, 185). In *Tristram Shandy*, effects produced by the elusive “grain” of gesture and voice are, in a literal sense, more than significant for producing meaning in the world: in its ability to accomplish action in the world, the persuasive power of language and gesture is repeatedly valorized over the accomplishment of an epistemological explanation for a train of ideas. We need only contrast Trim’s reading of Yorick’s sermon on consciousness with Toby’s discourse on ravelins and half-moons or Walter’s elaborate but ultimately self-defeating epistemological systems to see this contrast in the text. In *Tristram Shandy* language, or, more generally, communication (language, gesture, voice timbre, colour, etc.) is the peculiar kind of causal “space” which Tristram’s nose signifies, a space from which causality and meaning issues, but which cannot *prima facie* be deduced from a prior meaning effect. But this very uncertainty is productive of history. Tristram’s narrative, organized expressly to lay before the reader what Tristram knows, consistently seems to fail to provide, and at times explicitly derides, knowledge *per se*. As Tristram points out, “intricate are the troubles which the pursuit of this bewitching phantom, KNOWLEDGE, will bring upon thee” (103). Knowledge is, “like matter...divisible *in infinitum*” (170). Despite this and similar assertions, by the end of the novel it seems clear to most readers

that Tristram has kept his promise, that he has “laid before the reader” what he knows of “his” life. The visible absence of the object of knowledge over the course of the novel--in the immediate case, of exactly how Tristram’s nose asserts a causal mechanism, and, in light of his promise to make clear his life, of what Tristram knows about processes of association that produce, as a kind of epiphenomenon, individual causality in his own life--is precisely “the thing” that continues to produce effects in the social world, continues to produce a narrative--in short, that continues to enact the demand for an interpretation. If beyond the control of any one subject, words are, nonetheless, for everyone. Language may be the scene for a failure of human desire to control history; paradoxically, it is not the scene of a failure to produce it.

But this brings us to the threshold of another, perhaps more obscure way to think the signification of Tristram’s nose. The question of what is in Tristram’s nose may also prompt us to offer more of an empirical, epistemological wager in answer: nothing, really, can be in Tristram’s nose, not even empty space, given that, in the most material of senses, the protuberance that is Tristram’s nose becomes a spatial region emptied of its space. A most material kind of haunting, this nose is a kind of ghost-memory of the potential to house *nothing but space*, or to signal that most banal of conventions, a “natural” and endlessly naturalized body image at once suggested and foregone in Tristram’s relation to his nose. In addition to comprising the site of “vexatious disappointments” for Tristram, Tristram’s nose actually comprises *him*. In the context of *Tristram Shandy* such a statement is no mere witty reversal of a commonplace assumption. In fact, as I have tried

to demonstrate, many of the rhetorical effects of the text occur through what appears a literalizing of rhetorical language, an inversion of the “merely” illustrative and the declarative aspects of figures habitually ignored in the processes of making the world intelligible. As in the case of his reading of Locke’s metaphor for memory, Sterne’s method of re-investing the merely rhetorical aspect of language with the power to posit, or of “fleshing-out” a trope’s associations in order to revise an existing interpretation mistaken for *a priori* (rather than social) “reality,” is apparent in the parallels between Tristram’s denomination and Tristram’s “nose.” Both result from the too-clear, inflexible associations Walter has constructed but failed to control in the transition from individual to social agency. At this level of linguistic mimicry, the very individuality of Walter’s premises is reflected in the singularity of what such beliefs occasion. Tristram’s nose and his naming share a similar fragmentation: both are truncated versions of the identity they were supposed to signify. Quite literally, they are Walter’s ideas fragmented in and by the operation of the social world that, for the most part, is excluded from an understanding of them. Thus, it is not a *malapropos* gesture to assert a curious form of causality in the incident of Tristram’s naming: as a result of Susannah’s memory failure Tristram’s denomination is carried out, with the most direct of intentions, by the curate, whose misinterpretation, linguistically and socially, produces not only “Tristram” the signifier, but also Tristram the historical agent who comes to fulfill his father’s theory of the power of denomination. But to identify this as a “failure” in the operation of memory is simultaneously to impart, in a negative manner, causality to the subject at the level of the

figure “memory”: the figure over-simplifies the associative process at the level of its descriptive language, since this act does succeed in producing further action, it causes another series of associations-as-acts and so succeeds in part of its operation. In other words, both forgetting and recall are evident in the operation of Susannah’s “memory,” but this re-figuring de-naturalizes the agency attributed to the subject in its individualized “memory.” To secure causal agency to individualized memory requires more than the claim that, had Susannah recalled completely, the name “Tristram” would not be the life Tristram--unless, of course, we are all, at the foundation of our individuality (memory), Walter Shandys. In the topsy-turvy translation of causality from individual to social agency characteristic of Tristram’s world, his denomination is “carried out” to a greater degree by a faulty memory and a mis-interpretation than by adherence to Walter’s intentions. That something (or some thing) is produced in the exchange is quite natural. The “world,” after all, acts constantly--is, or appears, prior to processes of individuation, one undifferentiated act: the Supreme agency, temporal omniscience, is also undisputed causality. Walter’s intentions, however, could be considered only in the most negative of senses “causal.” In the social world of transposing “intention” into act, Walter’s agency reverts to no more than a trope of traditional interpretations of causality: in such episodes the trope of individual “intentionality” is revised and brought into focus *as* an associative figuration by the social network of (mis)interpretative practices that actually accomplishes acts--in this case, of (mis)naming the child or flattening its nose into an unnameable physical attribute. As Walter later acknowledges, again in a language pitting the implied

subjective agency of mathematical measurement against his own de-naturalization of
 subjective control (articulated again in the language of obscure causation, “chance”):

With all my precautions, how was my system turned topside turvy in the womb with my child! his head exposed to the hand of violence, and a pressure of 470 pounds averdupois weight acting so perpendicularly upon its apex--that at this hour ‘tis ninety *per Cent.* insurance, that the fine network of the intellectual web be not rent and torn to a thousand tatters.

--Still we could have done...

Still, brother *Toby*, there was one cast of the dye left for our child after all... (355-6)

In asserting that *Tristram Shandy* continually forces us to re-read such sacred interpretative canons as the relation of individuality (and individuation) to causality, I am not attempting to ascribe to the text a simple inversion, from specific “individual” to abstract “social,” (or “individual” to “organic/material”--in short, any entity divested of “human” agency) of a cause and effect structure. To be sure, the “nose” does not know that it is not merely a nose (and, given its dis-figurement, not even a nose); however, the dis-figured nose, both a “part of a whole” (as Tristram’s nose) and a visible absence or aberration of identity (since it is not even a “part of a part,” so damaged it does not satisfy the constitutive functions of a nose) is invested with more positing power than is Tristram, in social if not in narrative terms. I am suggesting, rather, that *Tristram Shandy* calls into question the attribution of an “intentionality” coincident with human thought and desire, and further, that Sterne suggests this custom of thought is an effect of language--is a socially accepted tropological network of associations that configures “the individual,”

and perhaps more importantly, becomes an inter-personal relational structure that secures “individuality” as a foundational attribute in the on-going eighteenth-century revision of “the social.” And so Tristram’s nose, in its metaphorical relation to Tristram’s identity-formation, comes to signify an attribute imbued with “singularity” (in Congreve’s sense of that word) but devoid of its constitutive functions--just as Tristram, over the course of the narrative, is invested with individuality but is emptied of the constitutive property of the individual: subjective agency.

In contrast to Zimmerman’s use of the lovers’ tomb as an apt emblem for the text’s meditation on history, then, Tristram’s “lost” nose is the “invisible” bridge which re-situates the trans-personal emergence of “the individual” in the social world (and, consequently, “history” in a very delimited sense) and re-constitutes the social world’s agency in the formation of individual subjectivity and memory. In the first instance, the nose is emptied of what Hume might call its habitual or “customary” purpose. As Hume states in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, “wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding; we always say, that this propensity is the effect of *Custom*” (28). For Hume, causation is a habit of the mind, a matter of faith. This means that “causation” is not simply the individual’s autonomic investment in cause and effect, but, perhaps more significantly, the individual’s acceptance of the manifold of an anterior social experience through his/her unquestioning or largely unconscious espousal of causation. Symptomatic of this process is the

transposition of cause and effect from a socialized *a priori* to a transcendental imperative, thereby effecting, as part of the “social contract,” the “free consent” of a particular operation of “memory”: social custom is “re-membered” as “transcendental causality,” while “the social contract” simultaneously occludes the forgetting of the social production of the “customary” association. Thus, the “natural actions” of a human’s life “should be call’d his Non-Naturals,” as Tristram intimates (84). Hume’s philosophical and secular scepticism is, if not quite universal doubt, potentially a more radical form of, if not wholly autonomous movement from, the tradition of fideistic scepticism (Montaigne, Erasmus, Rabelais, and Cervantes) with which J.T. Parnell and Donald R. Wehrs position Sterne.¹¹

Hume actually takes the anterior formation of the individual’s thought processes to a curiously socialized form of experiential solipsism:

All inferences from experience...are effects of custom, not of reasoning. Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. (29)

If we focus on the latter aspect of the way in which Hume’s individual comes to causation, we could say that this acceptance of “fact” is not merely the passive reception of technologies of knowledge, obligation, and memory by the subject. If this were the

¹¹ J.T. Parnell, “Swift, Sterne, and the Skeptical Tradition,” in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 23 (1994): 221-42; Donald R. Wehrs, “Sterne, Cervantes, Montaigne: Fideistic Skepticism and the Rhetoric of Desire,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 25 (1988): 127-51.

case, “causality” would function in a unidirectional way, from *socialis* to subject, with no overlap between the construction of the individual and the appearance of the social, with no attendant confusion of agency and causality at the level of the (autonomous) subject. The boundaries between the subject and the social world would be clearly defined, and “the subject” would be merely the designation of a hollow space of potential awaiting fulfilment by the society that produced it. More significantly, this process of designating the individual is a repetition of the making of the world *as* the individual subject, the simultaneous “individuation” of the subject and “naturalizing” of that process by the performative power of the social contract, which ensures “customary” action *as*, as well as *for*, “the individual.” In other words, in *Tristram Shandy* Sterne suggests that the “individual” is a space of cultural production just as are other habitual associations, since the associations of causality and agency that collect around it are bequeathed to a posterity whose acts form the present in their adoption of the prior “customs” of a social world that itself cannot produce the context that fulfills the slated promise of “the individual.” But individuals also act *through* this social designation of agency as though the causal agent analogous with “the individual” can be fulfilled, and in doing so produce histories beyond even their designation as intentional objects of the social sphere. Shuttled across history in the form of the contract in *Tristram Shandy*, then, is this curious form of “memory” which Hume calls “custom” or “habitual” association, as much an irrefutable recollection of the individual *for* posterity as it is a necessary forgetting of the individual as fragmented causal actant. This process would logically precede even the positioning of the individual as the

(solipsistic) ground for constructing the “world,” since causality would first be necessary to form a constituent part of such an “individual.” The self-determining if fragmented individual of romantic fictions--that subject who attempts to make analogous causality and agency, who would radically distinguish self- from social-formations of individuality--would have to emerge out of the long history of thinking such a confluence of dysfunctional agency, historical causality, and intentionality.

The practical, empirical import of these seemingly abstruse, counter-intuitive remarks can be made clear Walter’s and Tristram’s “freely” occluded subject positions. In his continued performance of honouring a father’s and mother’s contract that pre-exists him, Walter, like Tristram, is “caught” by the contradictory notion of “free obligation.” Unlike Tristram, whose nose precludes his freedom to act in the social world of interpretation as he would choose, Walter can choose between two alternatives in entering into the social obligation of the contract--or so it appears. In reality, Walter’s subjectivity, in a very real sense, is torn between what Tristram calls “TRADITION” and “INTEREST.” Sterne’s linguistic play, a collapse agency in the difference between conflicting principles of social and contractual obligation, subtly interrogates the very ground of the emerging liberal democratic state: the freely consenting, rationally invested individual. Revealed as a palimpsest of this capitalistic “individual,”¹² Walter’s “natural

¹²I am thinking of, and developing in a very different direction, Joyce Oldham Appleby’s remark about the construction of the bourgeois individual of consensual “self-interest”: “John Locke...understood well the fragile underpinnings of an exchange economy. Commerce was more than anything else a system of promises...If people could

freedom" (Locke, *Two Treatises*, 330) is poised between faithlessly honouring a contractual obligation that he has not and cannot have entered into freely, and the inability to act on the self/monetary "interest" attributed to this "consenting individual." Walter cannot win and cannot choose: by honouring the contract his father has made, Walter loses the autonomy attributed to the contractual individual, as well as the monetary "interest" that forms the nexus of the individual's decision-making process; dishonouring the contract is not a legitimate choice for him since he has been "written" into the performance of the contract "freely" by his father. Walter cannot uphold both ends of the "individual" bargain. But both are essential to the performance of "the contract."

Walter's very situation performs a re-reading of Locke's foundational social (contract)dictum: "Men being, as has been said, by Nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this Estate...without his own *Consent*" (330). In such instances, Sterne seems to use his characters to refute directly Locke's statements about the "consent" of the "free individual" that forms the compact of freely-acting individuals; in fact, at one point in the Second Treatise of *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke writes, "...this son [of the man who is bound by a promise], when a Man, being altogether as free as the Father, any *act of the Father can no more give away the liberty of the Son*, than it can of any body else" (346; italics in original). Hume's "Of the Original

be expected to cheat or lie in pursuit of their profit, how could those great enterprises be undertaken that required confidence that others would perform their duty" (*Economic Thought and Ideology*, 188).

Contract” expresses the problem this logic presents: “as human society is in perpetual flux...it is necessary, in order to preserve stability in government, that the new brood should conform themselves to the established constitution, and nearly follow the path which their fathers, treading in the footsteps of theirs, had marked out to them...violent innovations no individual is entitled to make” (463). But Sterne takes this point further than both Locke and Hume: Tristram’s birth, in which his subjectivity is, in the “performance” of an anterior contract, forever “fixed” socially, suggests that Tristram’s social obligation and position as a subject pre-exist his becoming a biological entity. Similarly, Walter’s need to honour the father’s contract that pre-exists his ability to choose freely whether or not to enter into the (future of) obligation that contract designates, reveals the ideality of Locke’s remarks in “The Second Treatise” about the nature of the relation between “the individual” and “the social contract.”

The social contract’s centring of “the individual” in the performative space of the promise is a tacit “reminder” of the assumption that a promise is a free creation of a relationship that did not previously exist, the paradoxical ability of consenting individuals to “enter into” a relationship where none existed. In other words, the centring of this form of consenting “individual” prior to an operation that discloses the emergence of any “particularized” individual, is actually coincident with the emergence of “failure” as a trope of memory, association, and cognition in understanding the functioning of the world--but these “failures” then become, of necessity, the impermeable boundary that contours projections of “subjectivity.” In this sense, to “fail” in these discretionary and

stranger also signify in ways that differ from the figure of “the reader.” Both Tristram and the stranger are, in discontinuous senses, the scene of others’ disappointments: if the individuality of “the stranger” is all but obscured in the deliberations--along with the initial cause of the deliberations themselves--over the truth and falsity of his nose, Tristram’s peculiar “individuality” is produced precisely in such deliberations. But both become, and recognize themselves as, de-realized texts of “the individual”; in differing ways both become the illusorily self-identical site for others’ anxious completion less as self-identical individuals than as social subjects. As a palimpsest of others’ social positions, however, their own de-valorized (Tristram) or valorized (stranger) social standing also confers upon them a peculiar form of social and narrative insight: in Tristram’s case, his position is productive of the self-reflexivity by which he reconstructs his life. Less “his” than others to shape, since it results from his interpolation within a social context, this position nonetheless results in the creation of a narrative mode that calls into question the tropological and linguistic configuration of identity, genetic and organic metaphors of remembrance and historical “completion,” and the delimited form of agency whose (social) repetition “naturalizes” and legitimizes the concept of “the individual.” Less self-consciously, the stranger occasions similar processes of self-reflexivity: he is less the agent of this self-reflexivity than is Tristram, but he nonetheless is an agent of a transformative social potential. We can return to the agency of reading--and the transformative potential

suggests this peculiar openness in the reader’s relation to the text. See “Tristram Shandy.”

of *Tristram Shandy*--by way of the stranger's function in Slawkenbergius's Tale.

The stranger's response to the positing efforts of the community is to protect his singularity, as well as the singularity of his nose. His response, however, is only partly a measure of his anxiety of influence--an attempt to protect his subjective autonomy--for he does not refuse the conventional means by which the community "understands" him; rather, he refuses what has been, to date, the end result of, the cognitive object produced by, this process: "No!...I am not such a debtor to the world--slandered and disappointed as I have been--as to give it that conviction--no! said he, my nose shall never be touched whilst heaven gives me strength" (293).

Curiously, when asked by the burgomaster's wife what he would protect, the stranger does not, or cannot, answer her. An analogous scene unfolds a short while later in the tale when the innkeeper's wife makes a similar inquiry:

It never shall be touched, said he...till that hour--What hour? Cried the inn-keeper's wife.--Never!--never! said the stranger, never till I am got--For heaven sake into what place? said she.--The stranger rode away without saying a word (299).

The ultimate hour of unveiling the "truth" of the stranger's nose, as well as the ultimate meaning toward which the syntax of disclosure gestures are never specified in either the stranger's tale or his motive in imposing silence on the social inquiries that make the nose the *curio* that it is. The temporal and spatial destination of unveiling requisite to satisfy the epistemological longing of the community is part of what the stranger withholds. That this teleological temporal and spatial designation which secures his historical identity is

voiced through the object of his nose--that his nose is the object of knowledge, of identity--is inconsequential; in fact, the nose raises unanimous conjecture and debate:

...the riot and disorder it occasioned in the *Strasburgers* fantasies was so general--such an overpowering mastership had it got of all the faculties of the *Strasburgers* minds--so many strange things, with equal confidence on all sides, and with equal eloquence in all places, were spoken and sworn to concerning it, that turned the whole stream of all discourse and wonder to it... (303)

Each segment of society “reads” the nose through its habitual modes of thought, thereby subjecting to social review their own social identities as interpreters as well as their interpretations of the object of their discourses. This process escalates until the question of the nose is revealed as no more than an effect in the functioning of discourses that precede its recognition as an object of knowledge: for example, the “Antinosarians,” “Popish doctors” and “Lutheran doctors” engage in endless disputes until Slawkenbergius acknowledges that “[t]he stranger’s nose was no more heard of in the dispute--it just served as a frigate to launch them into the gulf of school-divinity...The controversy about the attributes, &c. instead of cooling, on the contrary had inflamed the *Strasburgers* imaginations to a most inordinate degree” (314-15). The *Strasburgers* “surrender” themselves (316), both to desire for epistemological certainty and to the process of constituting a chain of associations that produces identity and exercises individuality. Part of the secret of the stranger is that he is never properly “named”--in essence, his tale reveals that, for the *Strasburgers*, his “identity” unveils their own: the stranger’s nose informs and un-forms their processes of association, their means for establishing identity,

and their ungrounded discourses for asserting identity.

As the impersonalized individual, the stranger suggests that the form rather than the content of the tale contains the answer sought through the narrative details of the story; as I have represented the tale, the ultimate meaning of “Slawkenbergius’s Tale” is less about a particular interpretation of the “identity” of the nose or of the stranger, or coming to an understanding of the stranger’s historical significance, than the manner in which the community attempts to negotiate an interpretation of the immediate details of the story. The tale, then, is less concerned with providing an answer than with representing the process of interpretation that constructs (or demands or desires) answers. As its form also suggests, it is a parable about answers and about the practices of knowledge that produce answers; Slawkenbergius would dispense with the traditional means of closure, the moral, that serves as an answer in the formal parable, and instead, would rely on interpretative practices commonly/ordinarily “known” or identified as “reading.” But Sterne’s tale includes within it an unveiling of the form of the tale: Slawkenbergius describes the constitutive elements of the tale’s narrative, and re-reads those elements’ effectiveness in textualizing the community’s history: as terms which allow Slawkenbergius to read his own tale within the tale, “*Catastrophe. . . Protasis*,” and “*Epitasis*” (317) reduce meaning as “the form” of the tale to a prior encrypting of (Aristotelian) formal meaning, and should serve as a cautionary reminder to avoid thinking of reading in an un-self-reflexive manner. Otherwise, the reception of the text becomes no more than a further instantiation of the very processes Sterne parodies to such great effect

in the text: reading becomes a process of “interpretation” that hypostatizes intra- as well as inter-textual (or inter-contextual) understanding.

But how does Tristram construct an interpretative contract with the reader? In his own narrative (re)construction of subjectivity he encourages a revision of “habit” or “custom” in the readers’ practices. We could say that he is particularized by his community, but that he is not, then, an individual in the sense of possessor of himself in his ability to act as an autonomous agent, as the quintessential bourgeois subject who begins to appear in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*: the “self-made” man. In a manner which shares striking affinities with the characters’ struggle for control over the plot of “Way of the World,” Tristram is caught in this process of social designation and *a priori* if secular construction of individuality; in effect, Tristram’s very subjectivity is secured by his riding caboose on a comet’s tail of inter-subjective associations. To be more precise, in *Tristram Shandy* such “social contracts” reveal an inter-subjective dimension of experience that, to be sure, does not eradicate such terms as “responsibility,” “agency,” “commitment,” “rational choice,” and a host of other words relegated traditionally to the rational, autonomized subject; but the inter-subjective nature of Tristram’s on-going subject-formation both extends beyond the autonomous subject the dominion of individualized agency offered by such terms, and holds out that domain as a distant or distanced possibility--at least for Tristram in his designation as “the writing subject.” However, about the second of these possibilities we should issue a caveat to the unwary interpreter of the text (whether figured as “reader,” “critic,” “Madame,” or theorist): the continual

plays on the construction of “a reader” and “a writer” distend the autonomous nature of the writer (as well as the reader). Not only is the reader continually extended and retracted a performative power in the events of the text (for Tristram, as writer, constructs for the reader spaces of imagination and interpretation both in and of his “history/memory,” only to take them away in the fantastical narrative he creates), and granted explicitly a positing power over the meaning of the text’s narrative (the reader is continually coached to “pay particular attention”), but also such powers of the reader must extend to the intra-textual relation of the “autonomous” writer to the creation of his own text and to the sites at which the reader is urged to respond to, construct, or recognize the elision of meaning in her/his practices of interpretation. Tristram suggests this is a problem of what “order” the writer implants in the text, but that that order must be responsive to the desires, needs, or weaknesses of the readers’ styles of interpretation:

There is nothing so foolish. . . as to order things so badly, as to let your criticks and gentry of refined taste run it down: Nor is there any thing so likely to make them do it, as that of leaving them out of the party, or, what is full as offensive, of bestowing your attention upon the rest of your guests in so particular a way, as if there was no such thing as a critick (by occupation) at the table. . . I had left six places, and I was upon the point of carrying my complaisance so far, as to have left a seventh open for them,--but being told by a critick, (tho’ not by occupation,--but by nature) that I had acquitted myself well enough, I shall fill it up directly, hoping, in the mean time, that I shall be able to make a great deal of more room next year (97).

Tristram proceeds to “converse” with the “critick” on matters of narrative direction, characterization, and impediments to reading and interpretative practices--significantly, through Locke’s *Essay*. As Tristram’s digression suggests, for Sterne reading, too,--no matter how removed the historical and social context of the reader and writer--is an

intersubjective (and intertextual) process which raises the relation of the reader and the writer as a question, or as a mutual negotiation of relative position and meaning-effects.

In fact, Tristram diverts his story into this “discussion” less to clarify his narrative position than to assert that reading, particularly in its necessarily intertextual dimension, is itself a barrier to clarity of thought:

Gentle critick! When thou hast weigh'd all this, and consider'd within thyself how much of thy own knowledge, discourse, and conversation has been pestered and disordered. . .by. . .a pudder and racket in COUNCILS about ; and in the SCHOOLS of the learned about power and about spirit;--about essences, and about quintessences;--about substances, and about space. (100)

Reading and other practices of language are less opportunities for an epistemological restitution of obscure origins than for a negotiation of both the reader and the writer's text, context, and knowledge in the alternatively positive and recursive historicity that emerge in this wager of, and for, meaning. Such a triangulation of reader, writer, and text does not collapse “history” so much as demand a site at which the construction of history (and related terms such as “individuality,” “agency,” “self-reflexivity,”) is raised as a question. This is particularly true if Tristram's narrative recalls two senses of “text” at the site of its initial production: as an autonomous entity that asserts a singularity of form and content against a tradition such as “the novel,” and as a desynonymized translation of prior codes of meaning, a potentially transformative reading of antecedent texts. Overlapping in the two notions of text Sterne presents as Tristram's life is an “individual” and “social” text. In its very originality--its (perpetual) revision of narrative conventions, for example--*Tristram Shandy* asserts its transformative social power; but, at the same time, that

transformative power is recursive, in part a re-absorption into, and resumption of, the tradition of writing against which the text asserts its autonomy, a movement that delimits the transformative potential of the text in reminding the reader of the pre-existing codes, strictures, signifying structures upon which its own articulation depends, but from which it would depart. And of course, at the site of reception, the reader enters the “produced” text as a fragment of her/his social context. Sterne suggests the ground zero of “textual history” when he writes, “Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?” (408). But as we have seen in some detail, the very social nature of the text inures *Tristram Shandy* against a solipsistic “collapse of history” at the level of its intertextuality, even if it cannot and would not resuscitate the story of a transcendental “History.” Eternal history, too, we could say at this point, is the forgotten memory of a Shandean social contract.

All of these relationships--between characters, between reading and writing, between remembering and forgetting, part and whole--suggest that *Tristram Shandy* proffers less an eradication of “causality,” “history,” “memory” and with these terms, subjective agency, than an invitation to re-visit and perhaps revise the designation of “agency” in positing the contours of an individualized social agent. But, as we have seen, to revise one of these terms is to shift the relation of one term to the others, and, hence, to revise each of these words in the process of reading the text. A brief return to the conundrum of agency generated by the marriage contract between Tristram’s parents will clarify this simultaneous shift in the associational chain that passes for “the subject.” Like

many of the other practices that inform contracts--sacralizing children in baptisms, observing book dedications, constructing an epistemology of oaths--the marriage contract "performs" far beyond any contextual expectations invested in it by the participatory parties, who come to include not only Walter and Mrs. Shandy, but also Toby, Dr. Slop, Obadiah, Suzannah. That is, upon closer inspection, the marriage contract, too, reveals a tissue of interpretations, argumentations, acts, and lamentations that "lead"--outside of the intentions of any one participatory subject in or of the contract--to the events of Tristram's inclusion into the unusual inter-personal relationships and the obscure, perhaps absent, causal and temporal schema that construct his world as lived and narrative experience. More than half the text of his autobiography extends to events that precede his entry into the world. Balanced precariously at such points of the narrative is a recursive and positive axis in the signifiatory operations of the text, a rendering of the relation between the textual as a play of differences outside descriptive systems or designation (which poststructuralist readings tend to emphasize), and the historical, transformative power of the social context which the text "reflects" or refracts.

Emphasizing first a number of the recursive elements of this narrative anomaly, we could assert that Tristram's "autobiography" is less about him than about a great many other people, and thus, a collapse of genre distinctions. As James Olney suggests, the autobiographical text turns the subject into an object of investigation, and foregrounds operations of "recapitulation and recall" (*Autobiography* 252). If *Tristram Shandy* is less about Tristram than the social world that "produces" him, and it probes individual

characters' ability to recollect beyond patterns of association, then it does not substantiate conventions of autobiographical writing. Or we could assert that we have an "autobiography" that precedes the subject about whom it is written, and thus, an erasure of causality, individuality, as well as an inversion of temporality. Paradoxically, Tristram's life precedes Tristram! On the positive axis, we could argue that, in the very details of its recursions, the text urges a re-negotiation of the epistemologically limited terms by which we know ourselves as agents acting in the world: Tristram's story is, literally, materially, in the hands of others and is fashioned by them long before he himself is able to assert his (putative) autonomy. In this latter sense, Sterne's text becomes an agent in the transformation of (social) ideology. But neither approach to the work can wholly displace the other. As Tristram admits, by "contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,--and at the same time" (81). The differences between "obscure" and "absent" temporality and causality, as well as between experiential and linguistic "knowledge" are crucial to maintain for two (primary) reasons: first, perhaps more--or more self-consciously--than any other eighteenth-century text, *Tristram Shandy* unfolds within the tensions generated by these categories. Secondly, and more specifically, Sterne effects many plays both within and across these "oppositions," but not so as to collapse the necessary if often heuristic difference between them. As I stated this conundrum earlier, Sterne blurs such distinctions--but this is not to suggest that he collapses their differences

altogether. In *Tristram Shandy* these “categories” of understanding are less “oppositions” or its critical cognate, “conflicts” (in the sense with which much recent literary criticism has imbued these words, as signifiers for radically opposing epistemological positions)¹⁵ than *relational coordinates*, less a way of stating what knowledge is or is not, and more a device for suggesting ways in which a social context shapes, and is shaped in, the conversations, actions, and constitutive forgettings, of characters’ varying approaches to knowledge. Such a critical stance toward the work does not assume that the social context is ever complete, is transcendently “grounded,” in the ways called for by traditional theories of epistemology. In fact, coming to an understanding of the simultaneous failure of the constative, but success of the often un- or a-conscious performative dimension in the power of “the social contract” to produce “history” in *Tristram Shandy*, and, at the same time, reading *Tristram Shandy* as “social text”--as effecting a precarious transformation of what can be understood by such terms as “the individual,” “social,” “agency,” “history,” and “memory”--is not only the characters’ but also the readers’ tenuous but continuing exercise of intentionality in producing the world

¹⁵ The sense in which “contradictions” and “conflicts” continues to be interpreted in eighteenth-century scholarship is evident in Carole Fabricant’s “Literature of Domestic Tourism.” As Fabricant words this mode of critical association/engagement, interdisciplinary approaches are integral to an appreciation of the “profoundly relational character of all cultural institutions and artifacts,” by which she means a critical model must allow for “various levels of interplay within the context of a totality none of whose elements can genuinely be understood as static or separate.” Fabricant poses a “totality (‘history’) which is not simply an inert background but an arena of active and conflicting, *in the final analysis dialectical, forces*” (273; italics added).

in *approaches* to epistemology, and despite questions surrounding the constitution of “knowledge.”

The relationship of “knowledge” to “world” in *Tristram Shandy*--or in a re-directed version of Hegel’s sense of the term, a “world-ing,” the creation of the world achieved by participants in and of that world which, in *Tristram Shandy*’s *socius*, dispenses with Hegel’s atemporal, regulatory concept of history, the “Idea”--is shifted in this difficult assertion: the social network and the practices of interpretation that make visible the contradictions and cohesions of that network are mutually constitutive. With this relation in mind, in reference to *Tristram Shandy* it becomes difficult to establish “causality” in the more traditional sense of establishing relations of temporal antecedence between and among relatively isolated events. The text does, of course, have such relations in its narrative fabric. But these relations become so attenuated that Tristram is forced to “concede” in various points of the text that his “realistic,” or “real-time” narrative--the linguistic establishment of contiguous events in a causal (and temporal) chain--have become distended, and must continue to be “interrupted,” in order that he present a more traditional narrative structure in any form. As Tristram notes,

Could a historiographer drive on his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule,--straight forward;--for instance, from *Rome* all the way to *Loretto*, without ever once turning his head aside either to the right hand or to the left,--he might venture to foretell you to an hour when he should get to his journey’s end;--but the thing is, morally speaking, impossible: For if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid (41).

Similarly, incidents such as leaving Toby poised, for a number of chapters, pipe in hand, or

Tristram's assertion that he has written fifty pages and the temporal aspect of his narrative has not "progressed" to his birth, mark the tension between narrative and "real" time. At one point in the narrative Tristram acknowledges that he is "almost into the middle" of volume four "and no farther than to my first day's life" (341). Many similar episodes suggest that Tristram is less in control over the narrative "progress" than he often claims. As he says at one such point where the "story" and the "digression" mark the boundary of one another, "I have left my father lying across his bed, and my uncle *Toby* in his old fringed chair, sitting beside him, and I promised I would go back to them in half an hour, and five and thirty minutes are laps'd already" (278). He goes on to lament, and enumerate, the work left undone, a narrative promise broken:

Of all the perplexities a mortal author was ever seen in,--this certainly is the greatest, for I have *Hafen Slawkenbergius's* folio, Sir, to finish--a dialogue between my father and my uncle *Toby*, upon the solution of *Prignitz*, *Scroderus*, *Ambrose Paræus*, *Ponocrates*, and *Grangousier* to relate,--a tale out of *Slawkenbergius* to translate, and all this in five minutes less, than no time at all;--such a head!-- (278).

If such episodes disclose that the causal chain is "interrupted" by "digressive" material, however, then the reverse holds true: the elements of the text that do not observe causal structuring are often "reduced" to serving as elements of a temporal/causal chain, and, further, the digressions are interrupted by promises of a narrative, and by narrative itself as an implicit promise to deliver a coherent story. As Tristram remarks, "Digressions, incontestably, are the sun-shine;--they are the life, the soul of reading;--take them out of this book for instance,--you might as well take the book along with them" (81). In either case, Sterne marks and maintains the borders of this tension throughout the text--at no

point does he work to make the reversible wheels of “accident” and “order” spin only in one direction.

One aspect of this narrative gap between individual intentionality and agency and the un- or a-conscious “work”--somewhat analogous to Freud’s “dream work”--of the “social” is that, within the narrative that is *Tristram Shandy*, it is Tristram--and not his mother or father, or not only his mother and father--who pays the price of the marriage contract in an all too literal sense, with his fragmented, ruined nose and his resulting life. Similarly, as text, Tristram’s life is enacted in the discrepancy between his lived experience and his narration of that experience. These discrepancies become the ground for an exploration of the contours of social “memory”--the social body’s ability to recall to itself its “agency” in the formation of individuals or events within it.¹ Through the plays on the metaphor of the contract and the individuals’ lack of control over the actual fulfilment of contracts, Sterne uses Tristram’s life to conflate the “content” of individual memory and the site of social memory (history): if the fulfilment of the marriage contract remains beyond the control of participants in that contract, but Tristram is “produced” by that contract, then “history” becomes the locus for agency regarding Tristram’s “misfortunes.” The “contract” and contractual obligations, then, occasion a necessarily social site for the forgetting of the (social) act of interpolating the individual as repository for causal agency; this is true in the very instantiation of the Law of contractual obligation *as* social, beyond the control of any one subject, even (and especially) for individuals who are direct parties to the agreement ratified in the contract. To simplify, the Law of the contract operates in

two ideologically contradictory ways: in securing a future action or actions, contracts assign historical or temporal agency to individual actants; but once agreed upon by those actants, the performative nature of the contract de-individualizes power over actions, and locates that power to perform or not perform actions specified in the contract to the abstracted judgement of “the social.” But whether or not the contract recognizes this unstable boundary between the individual and the social, the a-conscious “work” of the social--its ability to de-individualize intentionality in the performance of contractual obligations--remains the largely untraceable agent in the characters’ lives. In addition, to sign the contract is, paradoxically, to remove one’s individualized agency and replace it--or over-write it, as it were, to produce one’s own agency as a palimpsest of the social demand for both the performance or non-performance of specific acts, and for an individual who can be responsible for observing the completion of those acts specified by the contract--to replace it with an abstract social mechanism for adjudicating fulfilment of that contract’s specifications. But this paradoxical tableau of the law of the contract is “forgotten,” on the level of social practices, over and over in *Tristram Shandy*, given that the individualization of agency in the name of which characters “sign” a contract is always revealed as a forgetting of the nature of agency, a socially sanctioned practice of forgetting the non-conformity of “agency” to individual intentionality. More specifically, “the social” mechanism of the contract, while absolutely necessary, is an obstruction of “memory” since it attempts to sublimate a socially recognized--and constructed-- agency for an individualized promise, but also constructs the grounds of identity by which a

promise *can* be made by “an individual.” As we have seen in a number of incidents in the text, a promise—even an “individualized” one—requires an informed social body of actants to carry out that promise while maintaining the original intentionality in which the promise has its origins. In fact, we could say that the paradoxical agency involved in the very notion of recognizing contractual obligation is the social body’s method for dealing with the trauma of a fragmented (individualized) agency. The contract is “the text” by means of which individuals gather to forget, suppress or otherwise elide their lack of autonomy as intending individuals and their openness to “ruin” in the social world, and, at the same time, fail to remember that individuation itself is, foremost, a social mechanism and achievement at the level of “causality.” Tristram’s life—or more poignantly, his narrative of his life—in effect functions to remind the social sphere of its necessary fragmentation of agency at the very level at which the social nexus would claim to inscribe agency: as a founding attribute of individuation, and means of asserting, individuality.

But if Tristram is a figure of contract laws’ failure to circumscribe future acts to the letter of the law, in this same figure of “failure” is the mechanism to recall, to the construction of the “social subject,” the full range of the individual subject’s agency once individuation becomes devalued. That is, agency thought *outside* the social—exclusively in terms of the individual—is loss, fragmentation; agency thought *through* the social may not appear complete, but does offer the very narrative of Tristram and others’ lives. Sterne’s narrative *does* seem to function in these two mutually negating ways: *Tristram Shandy* presents the promise of a fully realized historical narrative as a contract that cannot be

fulfilled, but also as the site through which Tristram's life is performed as though language could fulfill its promise to provide the meaning of his life. This is not to say that in *Tristram Shandy* historiography, or narrative in general, is fragmented to the point of an unreclaimable ruin; nor is it to suggest that, for example, Elizabeth Harries' theological interpretation of Sterne's "ruin" as an observance of the Biblical injunction to "gather up the fragments" through recourse to narrative strategies of representation represents the whole of Sterne's understanding of the function of narrative. Indeed, for my purposes, Harries' interpretation diminishes the *social import* of Sterne's concern with "fragments" and fragmentation on varying levels of the narrative. If I have sought a critical reading process that highlights the social discursivity behind Sterne's notion of historiographical narrative, that effort has been to offer ways in which *Tristram Shandy* emerges less as an onto-theological answer or containment of doubts about the teleological character of individual experience, civil action, and narrative representation, and more as a meditation on how the nature of the gaps among individual, social, and metaphysical descriptions of agency is constitutive of, indivisible from, "the social contract." If the nature of the contract is to secure a promise for the future--in fact, if the law of the contract is precisely for individuals to enter into the future *as* a social obligation, and for the social world to construct the future as an intersubjective project, then *Tristram Shandy*'s focus on various forms of obligation enacts both a mourning of the "memory" of individualized agency and a celebration of the remembrance of a startlingly social responsibility through the Law of the contract.

CHAPTER FIVE

William Blake, Georges Bataille, and the Accidental Processes of Material Memory in

Milton

In the “Preface” to *Milton*, Blake foretells a “New Age” in which “all will be set right”; this new age will turn “the Daughters of Memory” into “the Daughters of Inspiration” (*Complete* 95). By the end of *Milton*, this transformation appears complete: the poem’s coda gathers “All Animals upon the Earth . . . /To go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations” (144). But if the ending of *Milton* suggests a millennial closure of history, and thus, a framing of the work between the promise of a new constellation of social relations and the “fulfillment” of that promise, the text enacts no teleological movement between these framing devices. In fact, the apocalyptic scene of the ending is repeated three times in the course of the poem, as though the liminal site between the present secular and transcendental worlds refuses to appear beyond the language in which it is posited. If, as David Gross contends, praxis “is the hallmark of Blake’s work” and the “vocation he [Blake] declares in the ‘Preface’ to *Milton*” (“Mind Forg’d” 13), the text seems itself in search of a defining praxis that would transform “memory” into “inspiration.” Such emancipatory rhetoric comes to the forefront in a number of “revolutionary” texts of the late eighteenth century, from Richard Price to

Joseph Priestly, James Macintosh to Mary Wollstonecraft, but the mytho-poetic “figures” that populate *Milton* find no stable ground upon which to establish a harmonious articulation between “theory” and “practice.”

Blake’s *Milton* shares with Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* an awareness of the “holistic interaction” of “politics and spirituality, society and psychology” (Gross 6). But if both *Tristram Shandy* and *Milton* offer a paradoxical re-figuration of, in Stuart Peterfreund’s words, “the ideology of the natural” (“Blake and the Ideology of the Natural” 98), Blake seems to eradicate the possibility of social and individual memory altogether, as the mythologized forms that inhabit his text shift into endlessly fissuring identities that also de-autonomize the text in their repetitions and transmutations across Blake’s corpus. In the very figures who produce the social and material conditions of existence in their autogeneration, *Milton* seems to transmute subjective perception into the painful becoming that is “inspiration,” thereby creating, in Peterfreund’s phrase, a “condition of pure and unmediated transferentiality” in which there are “no spatial or temporal categories by means of which to distinguish cause and effect” (109). In this aspect of *Milton*’s revision of the social body, Blake’s text asserts its continuity with the probing of the relationship between subjective agency and social formation that characterize *Way of the World* and *Tristram Shandy*.

But *Milton* registers a radical anxiety about issues of causality and subjective agency that Congreve and Sterne’s texts work through in far less troubling terms. Neither Blake as producer nor as figure within the text can seem to find that philosophical

vantagepoint that would produce, as an affect of the text, “the clear sight” that would “help provide the basis for human emancipation” (“Mind-Forg’d” 21). The “Daughters of Memory,” mentioned only twice in the text, are not significant figures for memory in *Milton* beyond their role of signifying a pejorative state of association, a mode of perception that must be transfigured irreducibly. In their second appearance in the text, Milton questions the nature of his prophetic calling, wondering

What do I here before the Judgement? without my Emanation?
With the daughters of memory, & not with the daughters of
inspiration [?] (108; 28-9)¹

In fact, in *Milton*, perception--quite literally, the ground for associations of ideas--is transformed into a radicalized, socialized reading of Locke’s individual sensuous perception. The resultant social body of Britain that emerges, “Golgoonzoza the spiritual Four-fold London eternal,” is “ever building, ever falling” (99; 55-6); “memory” becomes the endless creation and forgetting of states, emanations, and partial selves. Clearly, Blake refigures the teleological ground of his “body/text” and “social/body.” In an effort to explore these difficult figures of the social further, however, I must recontextualize recent readings of Blake’s texts as well as certain interdisciplinary writers’ critique of the appearance of Hegel and Hegelian teleology in practices of scholarship.

Part of the difficulty of understanding Blake’s *Milton* as at once a product of the revolutionary rhetoric of political writers of the 1790s and a registering of overwhelming

¹ All citations of Blake’s texts are from David V. Erdman’s *Complete Poetry and Prose*, and are cited by page number followed by line numbers.

doubts or anxieties that attend the on-going epistemological and ontological revision of constructions of the social throughout the eighteenth century has been recent critical constructions of Blake: recent scholars of Blake have construed his texts as coherent, rigidly controlled articulations of social and personal identity. In "Dangerous Blake," for example, W.J.T. Mitchell gestures toward a reading of radical dissonance in Blake's texts when he calls for a "defamiliarization" and "recognition of his [Blake's] involvement in contingencies which may erode the truth (by whatever standard) of his art" (415).

Mitchell's evocation of such "contingencies" also suggests an implicit critique of the Hegelian dialectical method that attends critical practices, since, in Mitchell's view, Blake scholarship has all but occluded the recovery or re-discovery of the "dangerous Blake" through the critical practice of assuming that "'every word and every letter' (and every graphic mark) 'is in its fit place'" (410); that is, much of recent Blake scholarship--what Mitchell calls "the third phase" of Blake criticism inaugurated by Northrop Frye (410)--produces its insights based on the assumption that Blake maintains a rigorous control over the meaning(s) his texts provide--that no meaning effects or affects escape the author's inherent powers of control over the protentive and retentive narrative teleology his texts may take. Despite this critique, Mitchell closes his essay with an unproblematic recapitulation of Blake's mastery over meaning in both his own texts and those which, in the future, would be used to read, to contextualize--and thus, to form--Blake: "wherever critical theory goes, Blake will be out there waiting for it to catch up with his imagination" (416). Mitchell dispels the tension between an indecipherable, "strange" Blake and a

Blake that, in his ability to pre-constitute meaning, precludes the anxiety surrounding the reader's production of meaning--which Mitchell evokes explicitly as a necessary step in the revision of Blake studies. In fact, the relationship between Blake's texts and the production of "Blake" as an object of study can itself serve as a locus for a number of epistemological and ontological anxieties that cross disciplinary practices of establishing knowledge. Perhaps foremost among other works canonized in the discipline of English, Blake's texts seem to require "Hegel," or some version of "dialectics," in order to "complete" them, just as historical analysis seems, or is often figured as, complete or incomplete according to its relation to Hegelian (teleological) projection. Throughout the chapter, I will focus my remarks on Blake's *Milton* and the scholarship that attempts to reconstruct that text, as well as the relatively recent attempts of a few interdisciplinary critics to circumvent Hegel's teleological historical process. Reading Blake's *Milton* through Blake scholarship as well as recent "theoretical" attempts to challenge Hegelian (teleological) historical progression can serve as an apt illustration--an allegory, even--of the difficulty a self-reflexive movement beyond "Hegel" presents, and can serve as a reminder of the importance of Hegel's version of the teleological unfolding that is "history"--especially for those who would read the eighteenth century either "outside" of, or through, Hegel's influential thought. But this reading strategy, which would situate Blake's text more firmly within eighteenth-century concerns even as it reconfigured those concerns, can also suggest possible critical practices that gesture toward a "beyond" Hegel, if those critical practices do not thereby propose a more "authentic" theory of

referentiality. In a curiously proleptic fashion, Blake's eighteenth-century text can re-negativize Hegel's "historical" method for current scholars of the eighteenth century, at the same time that *Milton* reveals Blake's significant continuities as well as divergences from the work of Congreve, Sterne, and Wollstonecraft.

In pursuit of isolating traces of Hegelian reading practices, and in light of Mitchell's call for a "dangerous" Blake, perhaps the most productive question that can be posed in Blake studies today is not "What do Blake's texts mean?" but "Do Blake's texts mean?" Shifting to the second question foregrounds the sheer difficulty of establishing any referential ground in the process of reading Blake's texts; similarly, such a shift allows the recalcitrant elements of Blake's texts--for example, the profusion and interpenetration of names, identities, and material bodies--a less restrictive "free play,"² since Blake himself may not be in control of the collapse of identity that this interpenetration suggests. In order to explore aspects of this "dangerous" Blake I will place *Milton*--specifically, the profusion, in *Milton*, of shattered bodies, and the form of the text as itself a fragmented body of the "emerging social"--into contiguous relationship with Georges Bataille's attempts to disrupt Hegelian dialectics through his re-theorizing of materiality and his consequent preoccupation with the "sacred." Before moving directly to the seemingly violent collocation and collusion of the texts of Bataille and Blake, however, it is

² Mitchell's "Dangerous Blake" attempts to use Blake as a safeguard against the free play--what Mitchell calls "the threat of doubt and nothingness"-- of deconstructive criticism; thus, Blake will "prevail over" deconstruction because Blake "anticipates so many of its sceptical and nihilistic tendencies" (416).

necessary to provide some context within and against which Bataille theorizes his break with, or as Derrida calls it, his “trembling” of, Hegelian dialectics (“A Hegelianism Without Reserve” 253).³

Since Hegel, there have been numerous attempts to forestall or re-negativize the synthesizing logic of Hegelian dialectics. In Jacques Derrida’s texts, for example, the movement of synthesis is constantly deferred, and the element of irresolvable contradiction, conflict, or “crisis” is identified as a perpetual movement that serves both always to constitute and perpetually to threaten the integrity of a univocal meaning for any given text. Theorists as diverse in focus as Paul de Man, Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler and a number of other feminist scholars, and, in a less explicit manner, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to name just a few, have attempted to subvert Hegelian closure—for example, the supersession of art by philosophy through a perfection of the relation of content to form, which Hegel presents as the attainment of the “absolute Idea.” (*On Art* 103). For Hegel, the absolute Idea cures any conflict, crisis, or “pathology” of history in its inexorable movement toward unity; the movement of this “logic,” this dream of historical progression naturalized into “material” rationality, is clear in recent Blake criticism: Blake’s texts forego their own propensity to

³ As Derrida remarks in “Hegelianism Without Reserve,” and elsewhere, the attempt to displace Hegelian thought is by no means foreclosed: “Hegelian self-evidence seems lighter than ever at the moment when it finally bears down with its full weight” (251); in *Positions* Derrida notes, “it is still a question of elucidating the relationship to Hegel—a difficult labor, which for the most part remains before us . . .” (43).

fragment beyond meaning, and the divisive or re-negativizing motility of such fissures is resumed, and subsumed, in Blake's apposite marriage of grapheme and meaning, unruly material and binding form. Part of the difficulty, then, of de-Hegelianizing Blake is the result of a long-standing academic "custom" (in Hume's sense of that word) of thinking his texts through the predominant analytical categories of Romantic scholarship and thus, of seeing him as a pre-cursor to a series of concerns which preoccupy the Romantic writers, thereby all but ignoring Blake's eighteenth-century intellectual heritage (and his eighteenth-century "philosophy" of history and memory). In what follows, I will attempt a retroactive and re-cursive reading of Blake's *Milton*, from Hegelian interpretations of the historical, through the work of Georges Bataille and to a non-teleological historical sensibility characteristic of the mid- and later eighteenth century. This sensibility suggests, too, an epistemological anxiety subtending the eighteenth century that comes to its most compelling articulation in Blake's *Milton*. In this argument I wish to suggest that Blake is as much pre-Hegelian as post-Hegelian in his thought, largely because, as with much eighteenth-century rumination on failures of, or possibilities for, social amelioration, a distinct philosophy of history *does not appear* in Blake's texts.

Much of the theoretical activity of subverting Hegelian dialectics has taken place through a contestation of the term "body," and of the concepts of "the material"--specifically, the Cartesian-based relationship between the material body and the soul--that support Cartesian notions of the body. As Judith Butler writes in *Bodies That Matter*, "bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves . . . this movement beyond their own

boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies 'are'" (ix). Perhaps the most concerted attack on the Cartesian relegation of the body to an epiphenomenon in the perception of the ideal is Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behaviour*. In "The Relations of the Soul and the Body and the Problem of Perceptual Consciousness," Merleau-Ponty probes Cartesian formulations of the body/soul relationship. Citing Descartes' attempt to separate the material component which perceives from the ideal component perceived--"It is the soul that sees and not the eyes" (192)--Merleau-Ponty writes that

this expression must be taken absolutely literally and turned back against Descartes himself . . . the universe of consciousness revealed by the cogito and in the unity of which even perception itself seemed to be necessarily enclosed was only a universe of thought in the restricted sense: it accounts for the thought of seeing, but the fact of vision and the ensemble of existential knowledges remain outside of it. (192, 197)

The Cartesian "cure" for the problem of perception "permits abandoning the action of the body" and allows it to be defined as the "indubitable" object of a consciousness (197).

For Merleau-Ponty, the thought of the body, indistinguishable from the thought that is the body, becomes a "logical necessity" rather than a reflection of a pre- or extra-materially constituted, pre-linguistic truth (200). In subsequent texts, Merleau-Ponty would present a more wide-ranging re-theorization of the body's position in Hegelian and Cartesian thought. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, for example, Merleau-Ponty theorizes the body as a "third genre or gender" in forcing a dehiscence between the subjective and objective world: "At the same time that the body withdraws from the objective world, and forms between the pure subject and the object a third genre or gender

of being, the subject loses its purity and transparenence" (350). Similarly, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty moves from body--a term integral to the metaphysical tradition's movement toward ideality--to "flesh": "What we are calling flesh, this interiorly worked-over mass, has no name in any philosophy. As the formative milieu of the object and the subject, it is not an atom of being, the hard in-itself that resides in a unique place and moment: one can indeed say of my body that it is not *elsewhere*, but one cannot say that it is *here* or *now*" (147). In *Altarity*, Mark Taylor identifies the significance, for subsequent theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Judith Butler, of Merleau-Ponty's critique. After Merleau-Ponty's critique of the Cartesian body, existence is irreducibly carnal, and thought cannot identify the limits between the ideal and the material components of its own perception; thus, a cleavage that "faults self-consciousness" is created by "the body." As Taylor, quoting Merleau-Ponty, acknowledges, "Rather than a self-contained entity, the body is a 'gaping wound' that always remains 'incomplete' . . . while the reflective subject attempts to close in on itself by incorporating every other and assimilating all difference, the living body resists closure and necessarily remains open to what is other than, and different from, itself" (69). If we take Taylor's statement to its logical conclusion, we must say that not only is the body open to that which it is not, but also that the body must literally be its "own" other, since the philosophical foundations or justification by which the body appears *either* enclosed upon itself or open to its other--that is, not open to or constitutive of the ideal, the *en-soi*--are rendered invalid in Merleau-Ponty's critique. The body becomes the conflicted

territory in which not only interiority and exteriority, subjectivity and objectivity, intersect, but also the site at which the ideality of the binary logic that produces these oppositions is disclosed; hence, to state that the body is open to its other, to that which is different from itself, is to re-inscribe implicitly the very boundary that is critiqued explicitly. Butler identifies the linguistic effects of this problem in “Bodies that Matter”: “The body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified* as prior. This signification produces as an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action” (30). Butler dislodges the claim that the body is pre-linguistic; however, she follows this critique with an insupportable claim. For Butler, the act of signifying the body is exclusively productive rather than, at least partly, mimetic, since, in her words, language first “contours the body” and subsequently “claims to find [that body] prior to any and all signification” (30). As is the case with Taylor’s demarcation of a difference between the closed body and the body “open” to that which is its other, Butler’s location of a difference between “productive” and “mimetic” acts of signification is invalid in the absence of the epistemological ground, the *a priori* assertion, she has discredited. That is, in order to identify a clear demarcation between a mimetic and a productive thinking of the body, Butler must appropriate⁴ the very

⁴ In using “appropriation” here I am thinking of Jean-Paul Sartre’s discussion of “the slimy” in *Being and Nothingness*. Like Butler, Sartre interrogates the limits of the human body in *Being and Nothingness*, albeit with a different focus and results. Sartre writes that “the project of appropriation . . . compels the slimy [in its relation to the human body] to reveal its being” but this being is at once clear and opaque: “It is clear inasmuch [as] . . . the slimy lets itself be apprehended as that which I lack; it lets itself be examined by an

foundation she has revealed as invalid, since the ground that supports the claim that language is “productive” appears only negatively in Butler’s analysis, as the absence of a valid claim for language as mimesis. This epistemological lack makes of writing an interminable process, neither a cure for, in Blake’s words, the “Striving to Create a Heaven in which all shall be pure and holy,”⁵ nor a cure for the “pathology”--in Sartre’s words, the “inexpressible materiality”--that “infects” the pure space/time of undifferentiation in the metaphysical tradition (that is, that infects a specifically Hegelian understanding of historical progression, that produces an irreversible corruption of the Idea).

Much of this contemporary debate is staged in 1778, albeit in a different language, in such works as *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity*, an extensive philosophical correspondence between Richard Price and Joseph Priestly. The two thinkers range freely over such topics as the relation of spirit to matter, questioning the role of perception in, and *as*, the body. In a section of Priestly’s reply on

appropriative inquiry . . . Yet it is opaque . . . “because the slimy, in all its “inexpressible materiality,” disrupts the borders drawn by the consumptive process of appropriation--it refuses to be constituted as an object distinct from the human body or thought. “What comes back to us then as an objective quality is a *new* nature which is neither material (and physical) nor psychic, but which transcends the opposition of the psychic and the physical” (773). Much to Sartre’s horror (and fascination), both the human body and thought are drawn into this nondescript space/time, this continual disruption of borders, that is the “slimy.”

⁵ William Blake, *Jerusalem in Complete Poetry and Prose*, 198. All subsequent references to Blake’s texts are from Erdman’s *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*.

the nature of matter, “Of the Soul,” Priestly argues from Price’s previous assertion that matter is not impenetrable. Priestly contends:

If matter be not impenetrable, Dr. Price seems. . .not unwilling to admit that it may be endued with the properties of perception and thought. Since, therefore, *the uniform composition of the whole man* will be gained by the preceding hypothesis, is it not a consideration in favour of it? It can only be a supposed *necessity* that could lead any person to adopt the hypothesis of *two substances* in the composition of *one being*, especially two substances so exceedingly heterogeneous as *matter* and *spirit* are defined to be. (*Free Discussion* 167-8)

But Priestly does not stop his investigation of the matter of matter, and of the spirit of matter, with the recapitulation of the heterogeneity of matter and spirit. He continues:

Admitting matter to have the property of impenetrability, is there any reason to believe that the powers of perception and thought may not be superadded to it, but that we cannot *conceive any connection between the different properties of impenetrability and thought*, or any relation they can bear to each other? (168)

Priestly makes the perception of matter, as well as perception in matter, a problem for, a dehiscence in, consciousness. Once this is a philosophical *fait accompli*, Priestly draws to his logical conclusion:

Have we, in reality, any idea of a connection between the property of perception, and extended substance, or any relation they can bear to each other?. . .If not, is it not more philosophical to suppose that the property of perception *may* be imparted to such a substance as the body; it being certainly unphilosophical to suppose that man consists of *two kinds of substance*, when all the known properties and powers of man *may* belong to *one substance*. (169)

With Priestly and Price’s reasoned assessment of perception and “the material,” we are already within Blake’s aconscious body/text, a “site” whose peculiar materiality disturbs Locke’s refiguration of memory as a crucial component of perception and understanding. Memory draws its affects within the contours of a marked potential for a peculiarly

modern form of forgetting: forgetting *as* perception, as a lack within thought. The “daughters of memory” are, within Priestly’s remarks, reborn--re-materialized--as the “daughters of inspiration”: for Priestly, it is the body that can give “spiritual” substance to ideas, and vice versa, but the mind cannot be said to contain this mechanism as a site of its knowledge.

Blake’s body/social text is not the only product of Priestly’s re-thinking of possibilities for perception, memory, and forgetting. The assumptions underlying the (post)modern debate over the body--the very figure of the body as imperceptible perception--arise from the contextual horizon of Priestly and Price’s debate. Writing at the same time, in the same intellectual and cultural milieu as Merleau-Ponty and Sartre--at times explicitly claiming his distance from them--Georges Bataille, from his earliest work, attempts to interrogate “materialism.” As he states in “Materialism,” “most materialists, even though they may have wanted to do away with all spiritual entities, ended up positing an order of things whose hierarchical relations mark it as specifically idealist” (*Visions* 15).⁶ For Bataille, “dead matter, the pure idea, and God . . . answer a question in the same way,” a question that can be posed only by “philosophers, the question of the essence of things, precisely of the *idea* by which things become intelligible” (15). Like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Jacques Lacan, Bataille was profoundly influenced by Kojève’s Marxist re-reading of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic. In a dialectical/historical process of

⁶ All subsequent references to Bataille’s texts can be found in this text unless otherwise noted.

becoming, the slavish consciousness overcomes the atrophied consciousness of the master. If, in Kojève's reading, the master is the "catalyst of the historical, anthropogenetic process," the work that the master demands from the slave creates the "real objective World" (*Introduction to Hegel* 25-6). "In transforming the World by this work, the Slave transforms himself, too, and thus creates the new objective conditions" of the World by which the slave recognizes and exercises his humanity (29). For Kojève, "all slavish work realizes not the Master's will, but the will--at first unconscious--of the Slave, who--finally--succeeds where the Master--necessarily--fails" (30).

Initially, Bataille attempts to bring about this revolution in consciousness and the "objective World" by re-reading "materialism" through Freud, thereby constructing a notion of material praxis "based on psychological or social facts" ("Materialism" 15). In this way, Bataille attempts to subvert the idealism in his contemporaries' (although these contemporaries are never explicitly identified) notions of the "material." Thus, for Bataille, "materialism" will "designate the direct interpretation, *excluding all idealism*, of raw phenomena, and not a system founded on the fragmentary elements of an ideological analysis, elaborated under the sign of religious relations" (16). Increasingly in his late 1920 and early 1930s writing, Bataille questions the Hegelian and Cartesian underpinnings of his own articulations of Marxist emancipatory strategies, and the body--or fragmentation of the unity of the human body, and concomitant fissuring of self-consciousness--becomes a key element in this critique. In fact, Bataille will link death with the drive toward an undifferentiated ideal, which he designates as the "homogenous"

body. As he writes in *Hegel, Death and Sacrifice*, “nothing is less animal than the fiction, more or less removed from reality, of death.”⁷ Bataille opposes a “practical heterology” to homogeneity; yet, as in Butler’s assertion of the “produced” rather than the “mimetic” identification of the body, Bataille’s “heterogeneous element . . . remains indefinable and can only be determined through negation” (“Use Value of D.A.F. De Sade” 97-8). The attempt to displace--for Bataille, to “cure”--the drive of Hegelian and Cartesian (homogenous) thought for the sublimation of the negating propensity of “heterogenous” matter is complicated by Bataille’s refusal to designate “matter” positively. To circumvent this threat to revolutionary praxis, Bataille attempts to theorize a social space of heterogeneity--the “sacred.” In this effort Bataille’s texts and Blake’s *Milton* approach one another as radical revisions of the social world and the subjective processes that produce or re-produce it. Before moving directly to an exploration of “the sacred,” however, it will be helpful to situate common themes and writing strategies of Blake’s *Milton* and Bataille’s social heterology--specifically, the interpenetration, in their texts, of debased “matter” and the ideal, as well as the body and the written text.

Bataille’s writing practice, which he considered a discipline of “practical heterology,” led him, by 1936, to refuse self-reflectivity before his “own” texts. In “The Sacred Conspiracy,” for example, he is “no longer able to doubt that the lot and the infinite tumult of life were open to those who could no longer exist as empty eyesockets,

⁷ As quoted in Jacques Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy,” 258.

but as seers swept away by an overwhelming dream they could not own" (181). Bataille could be said to speak of both his own and Blake's production of texts. Bataille's appreciation of Blake appears in *Literature and Evil*, in which Bataille notes "the excessive violence" of Blake's work, a measureless force that lends to his texts "a form of purity" (79). To begin reading Bataille's work, and Blake's *Milton*, is to begin abruptly, with a certain violence--is to attempt to find oneself "in the infinite tumult of life" in which the texts aim to place and thereby, misplace our selves, in the interest of displacing the self-centering vision of the Cartesian *cogito* or the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Thematic and figural repetitions--phantasms, spectres, the blood of sacrificial slaughters, disjointed body parts, the body itself as a rift of life-force in the form of a cadaver or spectre: all are exempla of an obsession to reveal the ideal as a form of violence and to restore the violence of "matter" to the ideal. "Violence" here signifies a productive capacity that exceeds utility, that exceeds attempts to appropriate it within useful endeavour, and that, therefore, links utility to waste, to an expenditure that gains nothing in its volant energy--a monstrous "production," a text/body that knows no limits between text and body.⁸ Both

⁸ This excess of Blake's text over even his own imagination differentiates my reading of Blake's *Milton* from that of Ross Woodman, who recognizes the extent to which *Milton* is "bound to physiological processes," but who feels that Blake comes to "know at a conscious level the responses of his own body (nerve-stimuli) which presented themselves as metaphors." Thus, implicit in Woodman's understanding of *Milton* is the assumption that the text lends itself to a tropological reading in which the body functions like a textual figure or network of figures, but which is not thereby disrupted as a text itself--as a communicable entity made present in and through figurality. Ross Woodman, "Nietzsche, Blake" (131).

Blake and Bataille attempt to produce a negativity that is not simply “the underside and accomplice of positivity,” a negativity that “cannot be inscribed in discourse” since it is “neither positive nor negative” (“From Restricted to General Economy” 259). This obsession yet retains a seductive fascination in that, hovering within it as a spectre, is a language that speaks of an excess that is beyond *and* that, perhaps, erupts within, the utility of idealized forms and languages. For Blake and Bataille, this excess speaks, in an allegorical way, in order to “cure” the inexorable movement of both reader and text toward idealization. The specific form of discursive activity that is Bataille’s writing attempts to “treat” the reader’s impetus to remain within a strictly productive utility that gathers the widely diverse elements or disseminatory seeds of the text under a regulatory necessity. Thus, the seductive fascination at the heart of such a cure is a repetition of the very death-production that the text has been called into existence expressly to “cure.” The drive to “cure” this ubiquitous movement toward idealization is itself inextricable from a drive toward “truth.” At or *as* the secret heart of such a cure, then, is the cadaver of unity.

We can begin to explore this notion of excess in *Milton* when Blake invokes the “Muses who inspire the Poet’s Song,” in order to re-read “The Eternal Great Humanity Divine”; however, his invocation to the daughters of Beulah is a call for the guidance of those who have sanctioned the production of the previous illusion his text would disillusion or seek to repel:

. . . Come into my hand

By your mild power; . . .
 From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
 The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise,
 And in it caus'd the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet forms
 In likeness of himself. (96 6-10)

Blake's repeated invocation of the potential treachery, dissembling, and misguidance of the muses' inhabitation of the brain and body--specifically, in the case of Leutha's part in Satan's "sin" (105; 4-5; 106; 36,41), but also in the Spectre's inhabitation of "Human lineaments" where "The sons of Ozoth" occupy the "Optic Nerve" in order to harden the physical world's disseminating materiality into a "bone/Opake" (126; 34-5)--signals the need for an impossibly stringent self-reflexivity toward the inhabitations of his own brain and body. In fact, it seems that the body must depose the "head," the drive toward self-reflexivity, in order to write itself as a more authentic body.

In such works as "The Solar Anus," Bataille's writing itself becomes a cure for the accidental violence--the violence without object--of Bataille's mind. By 1927, the year in which Bataille wrote "The Solar Anus" as part of a psychoanalytic treatment directed by Dr. Adrien Borel, Bataille felt that the "cure" had controlled sufficiently violent episodes that threatened to erupt into the social sphere. And yet, the unrelenting obsessions of Bataille's later writings seem to give a more emphatic voice to that "earlier" socio-pathology. In a similar application of the text as cure and completion of a fragmented subjectivity, Paul Youngquist sees Blake's *Milton* as "the fruits of a pathological distortion of consciousness" that yet reveals "elements of *this* world, hitherto closed from

sight and mind” (“Criticism and the Experience of Blake’s *Milton*” 557). But in the case of Blake as in the case of Bataille, it is difficult to support the claim that the writing of *Milton* cured Blake in the predominant psychoanalytic sense of that word. For example, Youngquist claims that “myth in *Milton* enacts a healing as through it Blake masters the distortion of human experience that is vision and re-establishes a living relationship with the world . . . It is Blake’s myth, and not self-mastery, that allows him to stand at the end of *Milton* unmolested by his own pathological experience, eagerly awaiting apocalypse” (569). Similarly, Andrew M. Cooper writes that *Milton* is “a potential barrier to life which succeeds, paradoxically, through the poet’s attaining enough inspiration to surmount it”; consequently, through writing *Milton*, Blake is “progressively becoming himself . . . the course of *Milton*, then, is a progressive compression of form leading to the internalization of form as vision, thus liberating the poet from his work” (“Blake’s Escape” 71, 61). For both Youngquist and Cooper, the form of *Milton* and the identity of Blake are unified, and Blake “appears in his ‘mortal state’ (42:26)” by passing beyond the poem “into the daily realities awaiting him just outside the last line, ‘To go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations’ (43:1)” (Cooper 73). Curiously, Youngquist and Cooper’s “cure” of the need to write is writing itself; similarly, such a cure does not explain the need to write *Jerusalem*--in which Blake’s identity is fraught with fissures, and the form of the poem continually repels schemes of unification.

Youngquist and Cooper’s hermeneutic interpretation of textual causality (in which the text produces “Blake” as an effect) and psychic completion, their construction of

writing as the supplement to fragmented being that, paradoxically, produces subjective wholeness, can serve as a synecdoche in a more “encompassing” reading practice -- that is, a more abstract, meta-theoretical figuring of a movement from “discontinuity” to “completion” as the organization of Blake’s corpus. In *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime*, Vincent Arthur DeLuca argues that William Blake’s texts, like Burke’s *Philosophical Discourse on the Sublime and Beautiful*, “provide a structure that includes a moment of discontinuity” (42). For DeLuca, Blake’s texts differ from Burke’s in that Blake provides a “*more thorough* discontinuity” and a “more radical division” of the faculties (42). In DeLuca’s terminology, Blake’s withholding of “concessions to referentiality” creates a reading experience in which “his words, letters, and lines take on a distinct intensity” that does not sacrifice the “intrinsic clarity of their form” (43). Like DeLuca, many other Blake scholars have attempted to read Blake’s “moments of discontinuity” as a formal element within his texts; thus, in such critics’ readings, significant textual discontinuities do not disrupt the organic whole that is the form of the text, and Blake’s works can continue to be read as “successful” revisions of earlier poets and poetic forms across a diversity of traditions. Similarly, in Blake scholarship, Blake remains an author who maintains a rigorous control over the multiple fissures of referentiality that his texts enact--whether these breaks in meaning occur at the level of the grapheme, the signifier/signified relationship, or the formal pattern(s). Nelson Hilton’s *Literal Imagination: Blake’s Vision of Words*, Lorraine Clark’s *Blake, Kierkegaard, and the Spectre of Dialectic*, and Susan Fox’s *Poetic Form in Blake’s Milton* are

characterized by what Stephen D. Cox, in “Methods and Limitations,” calls the “*a priori*” assumption “no less influential in the older than in the newer interpretations of Blake . . . that [he] is a pervasively dialectical poet”.⁹

All three critics recognize significant discontinuities that yet become subsumed in relatively stable “meaning” of the texts, although Hilton, Clark, and Fox locate that meaning differently. In “In Words Into the Worlds of Thought,” Hilton writes of the referent underlying all of Blake’s texts: “Seeing and hearing the word is meeting it alive in its force-field of sound, etymology, graphic shape, contemporary applications, and varied associations. This kind of attention . . . reveals that the keys to the gates of that text lie in its language” (*Literal* 7). The being of language asserts its continuity with human being: “Every word is a parable about linguistic structure as incarnate human imagination” (7). Curiously, this intensification and proliferation of association does not disrupt the drive that is meaning: the controlling logic of the text is the figure, and figurality, of imagination. For Lorraine Clark, “the structure of *Milton* illustrates Blake’s reversal of Hegelian dialectic with remarkable clarity”; yet, she sees no contradiction between her claim that Blake overturns Hegelian dialectics and the thesis/antithesis/synthesis structure she projects as *Milton*, which moves “from an initial state of ‘mediation’ or unity to an exposure of this state as false or illusory, then to a decisive differentiation or casting-off of

⁹ Nelson Hilton, *Literal Imagination*; Lorraine Clark, *Blake, Kierkegaard, and the Spectre of Dialectic*; Susan Fox, *Poetic Form*; Stephen D. Cox, “Methods and Limitations,” in *Critical Paths*, 26.

this state, and finally to a state of true unity and poetic vision” (29). Finally, Susan Fox sees in *Milton* a “dramatic dialectic of partial truths” which is “progressive conflict” that “controls . . . the poetic design . . . in its minutest as well as its most comprehensive features” (20-1).

For Cox, such readings lead to an impasse in Blake criticism “because few, if any, limitations are imposed on the possible meanings of the term, dialectics are easily located virtually everywhere in his writings--in every kind of duality, parallel, contrast, and apparent contradiction” (26). What does seem clear in the majority of Blake scholars’ enactment of the term “dialectics”--whether or not they feel that Blake is attempting to displace a specifically Hegelian dialectic--is the eventual resolve of contradiction. As such, many Blake scholars assert an affinity with Hegelian historical (dialectical) progression; as Derrida notes in “Positions,” Hegel, “in the greater *Logic*, determines difference as contradiction only in order to resolve it” (*Positions* 44). Cox’s remarks signal a significant limitation imposed on Blake criticism by the assumption that Blake is “dialectical”: the *a priori* assumption of Blake’s explicitly dialectical formation and production of his texts enacts, ensures, and inures either an overestimation of Blake’s control over the signifying processes of his texts, or the subsumption of dissonant elements in the unity of the form of the text. Armed with the assumption that Blake’s text is dialectical, the critic’s problem then shifts from the marginalized possibility that Blake’s texts mean *only* in the act of reading against some other text or context--that is, the meaning of Blake’s text appears solely because of the context in which the critic places

Blake's work. As David L. Clark notes, "in the boundary region of the circumference, 'All things' are necessarily exposed to the contextualizing presence of 'all [*other*] things'." ("Against Theological Technology" 176). If Blake remains a dialectical poet (in whatever form of Coxian dialectics the critic chooses), the problem of the relationship between "context" and the production (as opposed to the reception) of knowledge is largely displaced; the critic's task becomes a much more simple matter of selecting a critical apparatus that will translate Blake's signifying authority into its proper referent across and through the fissures, the dangerous gaps of meaning, in his texts; thus, the form of the poem or Blake's "control" over the signifying chain(s) of the text cure significant gaps or disjunctions in the texts. In other words, the assumption that Blake is dialectical disallows the possibility that the multiplicity of fissures in his texts may not be resolved through recourse to the authority of the author's message or to the author's control over the form his texts take--or even, in the case of Youngquist and Cooper's respective readings of *Milton*, to the form of identity that the author produces as psychological historiography in the process of writing: the cure, completion, or closure, through language, of the writer's gaps in subjectivity.

In the cases of both Bataille and Blake, the cure undertaken by and in writing is precisely that of effecting or exposing a radical pathology in the ideal itself. Writing, in its search for identity, is "a copula of terms . . . no less irritating than the *copulation* of bodies" since "the verb *to be* is the vehicle of amorous frenzy" ("The Solar Anus" 4). For Bataille, religions sanction a forgetting of this interpolation of body and spirit, "the work"

and “text,” by bringing about “a profound separation within the sacred domain, dividing it into a superior world (celestial and divine) and an inferior world (demoniacal, a world of decomposition)” (“Use Value” 96). Such a division leads “to a progressive homogeneity of the entire superior domain (only the inferior domain resists all efforts at appropriation)” (96). Bataille’s effort is to return this divine matter to its original division as a specifically human process, for which an affective or emotive value becomes an allegory that conflates the most debased and the most exalted forms of matter (or experience): excrement, blood, violent wounds, sacred sacrifices as wasteful or non-appropriative and therefore excremental expenditure, body cavities and effluvia of the body, moral debauchery, circulate in and among the sun, God, love, ecstasy, self-sacrifice, and ethics.

Similarly, Blake’s *Milton* takes the reader through the howlings, jealousies, blood, gore, cannibalism, fear, and terror at the heart of the production of the world. Like Bataille’s texts, Blake’s *Milton* restores to the Christian ideal of God (the creator and regulator of the world), a visceral violence, division, jealousy, partially formed beings--creation as a painful dehiscence. The text, and the “curative vision” as text, is itself inexorably linked to processes of the body. Contrary to David Riede’s claim that Blake “fully internalizes the muses,” Blake’s text/body conflates internal and external spatial designations (“Blake’s *Milton*” 264). The vision that is the text “descends down the Nerves” of Blake’s “right arm” (96 6); the Spectres “take refuge in Human lineaments” (126; 28). Blake himself, in his role as poet, seems to inhabit a space/time of an ecstatic involution of body processes, a synchronic node of time that yet lasts six thousand years:

a "Moment equals a pulsation of the artery" (126; 47) and

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery
Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.

For in this period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great
Events of Time start forth & are conceived in such a Period
Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery (127; 62-3; 1-3)

In this infinite and infinitesimal pulse, the process of writing, the "final" form that is the text, the individual body, the social body, and the ideal converge without hope of extrication; thus, throughout *Milton* are writings and re-writings of the violent or excessive processes of the body. In book two, Ulro becomes a body within a divine body, that opens onto vision in the "Four States of Humanity in its Repose":

The First State is in the Head, the Second is in the Heart:
The Third in the Loins & Seminal Vessels & the Fourth
In the Stomach & Intestines terrible, deadly, unutterable
And he whose gates are open in those Regions of his Body
Can from those Gates view all these wondrous Imaginations (134; 8; 14-18)

The fourth state, "the Stomach and Intestines terrible," is both "Law" and the "Stomach in every individual man" (120; 47; 121; 67). "View'd from Miltons Track" Ulro seems "a vast Polypus/Of living fibres down into the Sea of Time & Space growing/A self-devouring monstrous Human Death . . ." (134; 24-6) linked to excretory processes.

Commerce--"Allamanda" in the limited perspective afforded by earthly life--is linked to both vegetative and cultural appropriation: it is "the Cultivated land/Around the City of Golgonooza" (Golgonooza: land of "Art and Manufacture" (120; 50). In the text, appropriation/consumption and excretion seem to be, as Bataille calls them in "The Use

Value of D.A.F. de Sade,” a provisional demarcation of “the two polarized human impulses” (94), since, of the four arts of eternity, in “Time and Space . . . only/Science remains”, and “Science is divided into Bowlahoola & Allamanda” (125; 57-8, 63). This perspective of the humanized social body is limited because Golgonooza is visible only by passing through “the Polypus,” an impossible vision “not passable by Immortal feet, & none/But the Divine Saviour can pass it without annihilation” (135; 19-20). This impossible boundary marks the limit of human endeavour since, as Nietzsche states in *The Birth of Tragedy*, “the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points” which “noble and gifted men” reach only to “see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail--suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight*, which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy” (115). At this “limit,” science, and art as science, folds back upon itself, and the cure consumes itself in order to regenerate itself. The text--any text--becomes a final attempted evasion of a terror it reproduces in the very attempt of expulsion.

In *Milton*, this process seems to be the heart of the production of both the world and the text as world. In the opening sections Blake represents the process of the creation of the world as a tormented production of the body. Los and Enitharmon, in human terms Time and Space (121; 68), work together to weave life. At the site of the world they create, a nebulous body that both is and is not Los’s body circulates painfully in the abyss:

Down sunk with fright a red round Globe hot burning. deep
 Deep down into the Abyss. panting: conglobing: trembling
 And a second Age passed over & a State of dismal woe.

Throughout this section of *Milton*, Los's terror is the painful splitting of his body--paradoxically, as it takes form. Yet, this terror holds a peculiar fascination: becoming what he beholds, Los "wept over it" (97; 32); curiously, he also "cherish'd it/ In deadly sickening pain" (97 32-3).

Thus, Los's body undergoes an ecstatic fissuring that produces the text that is *Milton*:

all the while from his Back
A blue fluid exuded in Sinews hardening in the Abyss
Till it separated into a Male Form howling in Jealousy

Within labouring. (97 34-7)

Los's creation, painful and tortured in its own right, also includes the "Wine-press . . . call'd War on Earth" which is the "Printing-Press" where Los "lays his words in order above the mortal brain" (124; 8-9). This is the site of a festering material and linguistic energy, where the most material of creatures gather: the "Earth-worm," "gold Beetle," "Centipede," "ground Spider with many eyes," "ambitious Spider in his sullen web; the lucky golden Spinner;/ The Earwig armd; the tender Maggot . . . The Flea: Louse: Bug: the Tape-Worm: all the Armies of Disease," the scorpion, Gnat, wasp, hornet, honey bee, toad, venomous newt, serpent (124; 12-23). In this press--this technology for producing what Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, calls "docile bodies"--the human bodies are "grapes" that "howl & writhe in shoals of torment," and the description of the proliferating bodies of creatures folds into a catalogue of machinery whose express production is the proliferation of a limitless death

in fierce flames consuming,
In chains of iron & in dungeons circled with ceaseless fires.
In pits & dens & shades of death: in shapes of torment and woe. (124-25; 31-33)

“The plates & screws & wracks & saws & cords & fires & cisterns” which constitute the techné of death are accompanied with a lugubrious celebration by a monstrous, “celestial” body that exceeds and thus, conflates the auditory and gustatory senses of the human body:

The cruel joys of Luvahs Daughters lacerating with knives
And whips their Victims & the deadly sport of Luvahs Sons.

They dance around the dying, & they drink the howl & groan
They catch the shrieks in cups of gold, they hand them to one another:
These are the sports of love, & these the sweet delights of amorous play (125; 35-9)

In book two, the discreteness of Blake’s body--and thus, of the “right arm” that produces the text--becomes questionable as his body takes on the body of Los, assimilated or amalgamated “in his fiery whirlwind” (137 21) so that the now monstrous body of Blake “might write all these Visions/ To display Natures cruel holiness: the deceits of Natural Religion[.]” (137 24-5). Like Bataille’s writing, Blake’s text conflates the exalted and the debased, the holy and the cruel, innocence and crime. As Blake inhabits Los, and Los assumes Blake, the monstrous vision attempts to write its own tortured, de-idealized body in offering the text as a catalogue of aural and visual ejaculations: screams, howls, groans, emanations, deaths, and lugubrious body parts proliferate a seemingly endless topography of ecstatic suffering.¹⁰ In this body/text, Blake critiques Milton’s production of ideality

¹⁰ In “*The Book of Urizen and the Horizon of the Book*,” Paul Mann asserts that *Milton* is “a revisionary reading of *Paradise Lost*” in which “Poetic genius explicates or unfolds dark visions of torment in such a way that physical bodies are reconceived as spiritual bodies” so that Blake can “break through the chaotic, eclipsing shadows of absence into the lost light of presence that they obscure” (60). I am arguing that Blake’s

early in book two, when Milton and Lucifer converse:

And Milton oft sat up on the Couch of Death & oft conversed
In vision & dream beatific with the Seven Angels of the Presence

I have turned my back upon these Heavens builded on cruelty
My Spectre still wandering thro' them follows my Emanation (131 1-4)

Surrounded by the fissures, the painful productions in the celestial sphere, Milton remains willfully ignorant of the means by which life surges into an idealized Being. When Milton turns toward Ololon (142) he expresses the wish “to cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination . . . to wash off the Not Human I come in Self-annihilation” (142 37; 1-2).

Clearly, Milton’s description of his own processes of cleansing, of purifying “his” textual body of the nonhuman, is a making visible of an invisible process of forgetting, for it is not self-annihilation to cure one’s body of a filth that is *a priori* exterior to it. Blake suggests that Milton excises part of his own spiritual body--a specific part, however, the “unclean,” pathological part--in order to speak “truthfully” the spirit. Opposed to and yet assimilating Milton’s text is the production of Blake’s body/text, in which Ololon reveals Milton’s continuity with that he seeks to redress:

In Self annihilation giving thy life to thy enemies
Are those who condemn Religion & seek to annihilate it
Become in their Femin[in]e portions the causes & promoters
Of these Religions, how is this thing? (141 8-11)

text is less a movement from “physical” to “spiritual” (and therefore, to metaphysical insight) than an interpellation and interpenetration of this binary opposition; thus, if the physical body can be understood as the spiritual body, as Mann claims, then the spiritual body must also be understood as the material body--with all of the associations of the “material” that the metaphysical tradition seeks to exclude.

Through this painful, pathological process of questioning--the questioning that presumably has produced the text *Milton*--the Virgin Ololon replies "in clouds of despair," and herself fissures "six-fold" (143 3). The despair that produces the fissured body of the Virgin Ololon, in turn, brings forth "Jesus the Saviour" "In clouds of blood, in streams of gore, with dreadful thunderings/ Into the Fires of the Intellect" (143 8-9). The appearance of Jesus, too, is inextricable from the broken life-force of the body or bodies that the figure would save. The creation of Jesus appears another symptom of a more general pathology. Significantly, when Jesus is taken in the "Column of Fire," the shock, signified as "Terror" in the text, registers on the body of Blake, implicitly recapitulating the inseparability of the body and the ideal: Blake writes, simply, "My bones trembled" (143 25). Similarly, the ending of *Milton* offers no escape from the excretory and consumptive violence that precedes it:

Los listens to the Cry of the Poor Man: his Cloud
Over London in volume terrific, low bended in anger.

Rintrah & Palamabron view the Human Harvest beneath
Their Wine-presses & Barns stand open; the Ovens are prepar'd
The Waggons ready: terrific Lions and Tygers sport and play
All Animals upon the Earth, are prepared in all their strength

To go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations (144 34-40)

By the end of *Milton*, the human world stands poised to be consumed by the monstrous drives or pulsations that produce it; thus, despite Youngquist and Cooper's claims for a unified, progressive structure in both the text and Blake's subjectivity, the text/Blake folds back into its own processes of creation/destruction. Thus, contrary to the great number of

critics who read the ending of *Milton* redemptively,¹¹ the repetition of an apocalypse--traditionally, an end to time and a "beginning" of eternity--in *Milton* suggests that the apocalypse with which the text closes, the liminal site between time and eternity, is no more than a production, and re-production of a desire for historical and textual closure that the text of *Milton* has already foreclosed. Clearly, the creative process that produces and sustains *Milton* remains intrinsic to the excretory and appropriative world that produces and re-produces itself in this very process.

The apocalypse is one example of monstrous excess of which Bataille speaks; however, if Blake's explosive end of history seems outside the apocalypse of organized

¹¹ In addition to Youngquist and Cooper see, for example, Fox, pp. 15, 21, 221; Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, esp. 323, 355; W.J.T. Mitchell's *Blake's Composite Art*; Mark Bracher's *Being Form'd*, 2; Robert N. Essick's "The Return to Logos"; Jeanne Moskal's *Blake, Ethics, and Forgiveness*, pp. 49, 170. Such readings tend to produce a teleological reading of Blake's chronological development, in which the later "prophetic" works--*Milton* and *Jerusalem* in particular--represent a movement from the incompleteness that plagues Blake's earlier works. These critics discount or defer in *Milton* the survival of fragmentary qualities prominent in such earlier works as *Europe*, whose lack of closure prefigures, I would argue, Blake's thematic concerns in, and ending of, *Milton*. As David Ayers argues, *Europe* leaves "no prefigurations of the regenerate society" ("Representations of Revolution," 257). In a slightly different temporal schematization of Blake's texts, Peter Otto, in *Constructive Vision*, discusses only the later works and reads a teleological narrative of textual maturity in the movement from *Milton* to *Jerusalem*. Thus, *Milton* is a "visionary deconstruction of the Bard"--a negative pole or instance in a dialectic reminiscent of de Luca's moment of "discontinuity"--which is followed by the "visionary construction of Jerusalem" (97). However, if Otto approaches a reading of discontinuities in *Milton*, he does not treat the relationship of the textual violence throughout *Milton* to "visionary deconstruction," an issue crucial not only for an understanding of *Milton* but also in eradicating barriers to the ethical dialogism integral to Otto's isolation of the predominant theme of *Milton*, which, he argues, urges upon us the "power of responding to a non-violent appeal" (97).

religion (since there seem to be no “Elect” included in the Consummation, and, paradoxically, no radical “history” external to the material processes that produce the text), it is not quite identical to the social site of excess--the “sacred”--in Bataille’s mid-thirties texts. In book one of *Milton*, Los “puts all into the Press, the Opressor & the Oppressed/ Together, ripe for the Harvest and Vintage & ready for the Loom” (121; 6-7), despite the “Souls” who

howl round the porches of Golgonooza
Crying O God deliver us to the Heavens or to the Earths,
That we may preach righteousness & punish the sinner with death (121; 12-14)

Los refuses this request, and “all the Vintage of Earth was gatherd in” (121; 15). And yet, the apocalypse is a conflicted site of “cure” for social ills, since all of Los’s three classes of beings survive the “Great Vintage & Harvest” (121; 17). Similarly, Los’s thundering pronouncement of the end of the world itself does not escape dissent: after his speech “lightnings of discontent broke out on all sides round” (122; 63), and the excess into which the apocalypse releases life-energy becomes a resumed production of text. To speak of “cure,” then, in the context of Blake’s and Bataille’s texts requires a seemingly limitless series of qualifications. “Cure” provides nothing like a repose in a comfortable if static homogeneity of emotional, mental and social routine; the cure reveals *that* homogeneity as a constitutive symptom of disease. Analogously, such a cure does not sublimate the violence that seems a necessary constituent of pathology; rather, this cure--for Blake and Bataille this writing that is the text--offers only a re-figuration of the economy of that pathology, and thus, little control over, let alone an eradication of, the

“ideal” or the “material.” In Blake and Bataille’s texts, pathology is no longer located in and locatable as an individual aberration from the norm --a norm formed by and forming a collectivity of individuals; rather, pathology extends itself into the very formation of the world, the productivity of the normal, the separation of one body from another, and the impetus to define the closure of the text--including the “text” of history. In the case of these two writers, the text--far from curing the need to write--makes of writing the need for a cure. Such a cure appears to extend that pathology across the pure substantiation that is God, the representation of the ideal, and the happy consciousness that the sleep of reason--the naturalization of a restricted or pre-eminently productive economy--produces. The idealized form is no longer inexplicably exterior to the violence of repression and oppression; rather, the ideal is produced by oppression and repression and, thus, must itself reflect and remain a constituent of that violence.

For Bataille, the distinction between the sacred and the transcendental returns the transcendental/divine to its originary violence: “. . . a disjunction between the sacred and transcendental substance (consequently impossible to create) suddenly opens a new field--a field perhaps of violence, perhaps of death, but a field which may be entered--to the agitation that has taken hold of the living human spirit” (“The Sacred” 242). Clearly, the task of writing a “cure,” and writing as cure, moves such texts across the boundary that separates propriety from impropriety in order to mark--as Judith Butler suggests--the impossibility of the boundary itself. Once the violence of the ideal becomes naturalized--that is, when violence adopts the face of propriety--an outrageous, deviant propriety is

necessary to attempt to free life into itself again--or at the very least, to open propriety to its (non)separable other, impropriety. For both writers, this makes of war a necessity, and the rhetoric of revolution against "the proper" frames both texts as injunctions to pathology. In *Milton*, Blake suggests that aesthetic production can be mobilized for a social revolution:

Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court, & the University: who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! on you I call! Sculptors! Architects! Suffer not the fash[i]onable Fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works or the expensive advertising boasts that they make of such works (95).

Similarly, in "The Sacred," Bataille refuses to surrender "what possesses" him

to the standards of salesmen, to which art has conformed . . . God represented the only obstacle to the human will, and freed from God this will surrenders, nude, to the passion of giving the world an intoxicating meaning. Whoever paints or writes, can no longer concede any limitations on painting or writing; *alone*, he suddenly has at his disposal all possible human convulsions, and he cannot flee from this heritage of divine power--which belongs to him (245).

As in *Tristram Shandy*, subjective agency is, to a considerable extent, relinquished in *Milton*. In this situation, for Bataille as for Blake, pathology is itself the cure for which it seeks. Both writers construe the violent gesticulations of the material body as a mode of intervention in the systematizing of individual thought and social institutions, and the becoming of an individualized body is extended interminably, as is the formation of the social. Thus, for both writers, this cure does not construct a historical progression of teleological unfolding: in *Milton*, for example, history is generated in a "Period/ Within a Moment" (127; 2-3). Temporal progression becomes a synecdoche of simultaneity, which

is itself an absence of the ability to measure time since the body's processes, too, are merely a metonymic series of allegories of measurement. The synchronic mode of creation appears the recovered unthought of a diachronic experience of time; in turn, the diachronic simultaneously precedes and completes the content of the synchronic. Similarly, the texts do not ensure and regulate a madness contained and controlled by reason; rather, reason and madness, violence and freedom, remain curiously interpenetrated in their texts.

Despite this similarity, Blake differs from Bataille in creating mythological figures, and a mythological world that forms an impossible boundary between the human and extra-human worlds. Blake's "sacred" space in *Milton* is bounded by the mythological figure Los who gathers "Every scattered Atom" for the final harvest (121; 18). Whereas the origins of Blake's figures are indefinite--they can come from the operations of the human physiognomy or from an extra-human source--Bataille's extra-human figures (the acephalic being, the "pineal eye" that is blinded in the moment it achieves its purpose and opens toward the energy of the sun, and therefore is burned up and sees nothing) have far less of an autonomous life-world from the human. In fact, these creatures are human, all too human:

The bald summit of the anus has become the center, blackened with bushes, of the narrow ravine cleaving the buttocks.

The spectral image of this change of sign is represented by a strange human nudity--now obscene--that is substituted for the hairy body of animals, and in particular by the pubescent hairs that appear exactly where the ape was glabrous; surrounded by a halo of death, a creature who is too pale and too large stands up, a creature who, under a sick sun, is nothing other than the celestial eye it lacks" ("The Pineal Eye" 90).

This parody of the upright posture of the rational human body--one of the most

significant differences between human and animal bodies--is the scandal of a divine link between a human world of proliferating, indefinable materiality and its rational God. Bataille's critique moves beyond even the Gnostic mistrust of the body, a belief with which Blake has been affiliated. As Michael A. Williams states in "Divine Image--Prison of Flesh: Perceptions of the Body in Ancient Gnosticism," "The characteristic upright stance was a feature of physical human bodies in which even the Gnostics, who gained reputations as 'haters of the body,' saw something extraordinary, a sign of divine power" (140). Despite this difference in their figures of revolt against the metaphysical systematization of subjectivity and history, both writers construe their texts as movements that sustain, if they radically transfigure, religious purity. For Bataille, reason becomes the shadow of a violence that directs itself toward a formless, nameless freedom that he will call "the sacred." Essentially a religious activity, the experience of the sacred is directed not toward "a personal and transcendent being (or beings), but toward an impersonal reality" ("The Sacred" 242). The sacred is "perhaps the most ungraspable thing that has been produced between men" and, having been produced and not received by human beings from a source beyond the human, the sacred is, then, "only a privileged moment of communal unity" (242). In the apocalyptic, prophetic tone of "The Sacred Conspiracy," Bataille speaks of human life enervated "from serving as the head of, or the reason for, the universe" (180). Yet, the same could be said for the human experience of Los's mythologized body, whose fracturing, fissuring presence is the whole of human understanding.

How does the head that is human reason function in the economy of the body that is life? For Bataille, the production of God, the spirit, as reason (means-ends rationality), and reason as distinct from emotion (and from materiality) constitutes the proclamation of a discontinuity where only continuity exists. Blake, too, critiques the construction of such a division in *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* when he critiques the Cartesian doctrine “That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul” (pl. 4). By constructing such a discontinuity, the head then sanctions the mutilation of matter in separating matter from “itself.” But this mutilation is, finally, auto-mutilation. Reason, divorced from a transcendent source that is itself a restricted form of a more generalized pathology, is no more than a diseased life-actualization that, in its position of governance over a body that it must continually cease to acknowledge as part of itself, must accept servitude as its condition of possibility. The head severs itself from the rest of the body and can then cannibalize or appropriate that which, through an operation of Nietzschean forgetting, it is not. But this movement raises the spectre of a rational body that, as the ending of *Milton* also suggests, unwittingly but unerringly consumes its own flesh. In the gesture of self-definition, the abject-ed body and text cannibalizes itself in order to perpetuate the illusion of completion, of sovereignty, of closure.

The sacred, an interpersonal but impersonal space--in other words, a space that is generated by human beings but refuses a distinctly human form--seems to allow Bataille to theorize the stultifying violence of reason without himself becoming enslaved to it. Beyond the servitude of a means-ends organization of life-activity, beyond the

constriction implicit in the designation “human,” and beyond the prohibition that, for

Bataille, is synonymous with the Christian figure God, is a being “unaware of prohibition”:

Beyond what I am, I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; this fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime . . . He reunites in the same eruption Birth and Death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not me but he is more than me: his stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster (181).

One discovers oneself as other, and humanity as inhuman, in the belly of this acephalic beast. Lacking direction in the bounding coils of the organic and linguistic labyrinth, lacking a point of origin that can answer the call of reason that is itself an ecstatic whimpering of Cartesian longing, this impossible figure must make itself, and figure itself, as a provisional articulation of identity--a parody of that which it cannot even call its host body, since this identification of two separate entities (host and parasite) must itself be a parody of separation, an impossible bifurcation of an inalienable human cry. And yet, this cry that is the Blakean/Bataillan text is somehow less than a cure for the terror that produces an ideal reason, since it too cannot relinquish a longing for a space that refuses human utility--the very “utility” of a revised “materiality”--as its completion. As Jacques Derrida notes, “Like general economy, it [sovereignty, the sacred] is not the loss of meaning, but . . . ‘the relation to this loss of meaning.’ It opens the question of meaning. It does not describe unknowledge, for this is impossible, but only the effect of unknowledge. [As Bataille notes,] ‘In sum, it would be impossible to speak of unknowledge, while we can speak of its effects’” (270). Like Bataille’s texts, far from constituting itself as an escape *to* completion, Blake’s body/text strives to remain between,

entre-deux, the unified and the dispersed knowledge that would constitute the body of the world. In such a space of production, history becomes Blake's body, a text that simultaneously refuses the materiality of its own enabling conditions and consumes that materiality at the very moment it produces itself. History's pathology, its perpetual apocalypse, is to remain within this body/text in the very gesture of time's reconstitution.

CHAPTER SIX

A 'Degeneracy of Morals, With Polished Manners': Mary Wollstonecraft, Moral Corporeality, and the Spectre of Transcendental Sociality in the Poisoned Eighteenth-Century Body

The old government was then only a vast ruin . . . the people could no longer bear bleeding--for their veins were already so lacerated, it was difficult to find room to make a fresh incision; and the emollient prescriptions, the practice of former times, were now insufficient to stop the progress of a deadly disease. (*An Historical and Moral View* 328).

. . . in a man [are visible] the structure of the surface of the spinal marrow, the rise of the anterior and posterior bundles of the dorsal nerves, a ganglion in the posterior bundle, and the connection of the two bundles with each other, and with the great sympathetic nerve. (Alexander Munro, *Structure and Functions of the Nervous System*)

By the end of the eighteenth century, the “social body” had no shortage of eminent diagnosticians. One of the most enterprising and influential physicians of the social at the close of the century is Mary Wollstonecraft. “Degeneracy of morals, with polished manners,” she wrote, explicitly commenting on the political dimension of the French revolution and, implicitly, on the mechanisms for the suppression of a British cultural one, “produces the worst of passions, which floating through the social body, the genial current of natural feelings has been poisoned” (*An Historical and Moral View* 384).

Wollstonecraft is remarkably consistent on this issue over the span of her varied career as a writer; she does, indeed, provide a “historical” and “moral” view throughout her writings. Her first work, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, is an attempt to redirect the figurality of “female” morals in the conduct book tradition, from which is drawn

her next work of non-fiction, *Female Reader*, a collation of exemplary passages on conduct. Similarly, both heroines from her expressly fictional works *Mary: A Fiction*¹ and *The Wrongs of Women; or, Maria*, attempt to develop from manners a new morality for social action. Finally, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, too, re-states the problem of

¹ As Gary Kelly suggests, the title of the work is itself a genre-defining (and re-defining) act: "fiction," defined as something "feigned or invented" in Johnson's *Dictionary*, has a pejorative sense in relation to a corresponding definition of the novel, "a small tale, generally of love" (*Revolutionary* 42). Claudia L. Johnson develops Kelly's logic: *Mary* "attempts to represent something unprecedented in the history of the novel as Wollstonecraft understands it" (*Equivocal* 49). In Johnson's estimation, this bold, new representation of "woman" ultimately must fail: ". . . if the term 'fiction' seems to free Wollstonecraft from genre, it also foretells the course of her accomplishment. . . Wollstonecraft's fiction on one hand testifies to her power to think for herself, on the other hand it allows that the status of that fantasy is subjunctive at best and figmentary at worst." Thus, the text "finally founders in the discursive isolation that is at once its premise and its effect" (50). Tilottama Rajan had stated a similar view of the text's internal diremptions: *Mary*'s "identity proves vicarious, and consists of doomed attempts to define herself through others, equally doomed" and *Mary* "seals itself against even our passive participation" ("Wollstonecraft and Godwin" 226, 227). It is possible, however, to read differently the contradiction between Wollstonecraft's stated purpose in writing *Mary* and its ending, in which *Mary*'s only possibility becomes the hope for a transcendental resolution of gender inequities upon her death (an ideality that Wollstonecraft dismisses unconditionally in her critique of Burke's *Revolution*). Female readers' affective experience of this contradiction may produce revolutionary results: to recognize an act as an impossibility in the social world is also to extrapolate and interpolate the conditions of that act within the existing horizon of possibility. Wollstonecraft's later disparagement of the work does not obviate its revolutionary possibility or its potential contribution to a social context: the fictional text produced explicitly as an instantiation of a non-extant social imaginary reveals the fault-line of the social which ex-closes its possibility for fruitful resolution. The "contradiction" of an imaginary potential "drawn from Nature," as Wollstonecraft claimed, but whose very failure outperforms the social is irrefutably powerful critique. The "contradiction" functions in this manner regardless of the writer's estimation of its value (and Wollstonecraft was far less proud of the text ten years after it was written), since the text's affectivity is not limited to the writer's intentionality. (*Collected Letters* 162; see also 385).

the conjunction in *An Historical and Moral View*: “Manners and morals are so nearly allied that they have often been confounded” (*Political Writings* 70). Wollstonecraft contends that manners should be no more than “the natural reflection of the latter [morals],” but due to “various causes . . . morality becomes an empty name” (70). Paradoxically, morality is disembodied by a material body too closely approximating it; “manners” are laden with the material density of an aristocratic value system. Social parasite has become historical host.

Across this single, simple conjunction Wollstonecraft’s entire textual production takes place, as well as the daunting task of reading her remarkably polyvocal texts. Containing within a single interpretation the contradictory linguistic views of Toby and Walter Shandy, her own problem as a social critic is akin to their failed bridging of a linguistic gulf by way of a definition of analogy. If manners are the property of the “historical,” since they are in reality no more than a reflection of “the moral,” it is the historicity of social acts that has emptied the proper name of history. The “name” drifts through the present uninhabited by the force of the living, a body with no substance. And yet, as Wollstonecraft is passionately aware, it is in the social that the proper name of history *must* take its place. In *Vindications of the Rights of Men* one of her most vociferous remonstrations of Burke occurs when he counsels passivity, or more specifically, secular contrition as an exemplary form of transcendental servitude: the poor and disenfranchised “*must be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal justice*” (from Burke’s *Reflections*; as quoted in *Vindications of the Rights of Men* 59).

To this construction Wollstonecraft retorts: "This is contemptible hard-hearted sophistry, in the specious form of humility, and submission to the will of Heaven.--It is, Sir, *possible* to render the poor happier in this world, without depriving them of the consolation which you gratuitously grant them in the next" (59; italics in original). As she cogently expressed the urgency of the problem in *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, "is the humane heart satisfied with turning the poor over to *another* world, to receive the blessings this could afford?" (*Political* 61).

Despite her use of a millenarian language of grace in a distinctly secular context,²

² Mitzi Myers notes that moral reform, whether radical or Evangelical, provided "a body of legitimating imperatives and a vocabulary for venting female dissatisfactions" ("Reform or Ruin" 204). In other words, for Myers the "body" of this strategic language is distinctly "feminized." As I will show, Wollstonecraft uses this collusion of secular and transcendental language in order to unseat the normative gendering of social relationships which produce an exclusive either/or (i.e., either transcendental or secular) logic of female social positions. Thus, her "ultimate frame of reference" is not "non-secular," as Myers later asserts (205), but a precarious if strategic combination of the two temporal registers. A more intricate corollary to Myers' argument here are the two Wollstonecraft chapters in Claudia Johnson's *Equivocal Beings*. In a provocative analysis that captures much of the complexity of Wollstonecraft's feminism, Johnson contends that Wollstonecraft's "feminist" critique of dominant modes of late eighteenth-century discursivity is predominantly a defense of woman's traditional spheres of influence--in particular, a defense against a regendering of sentimentality as a masculine virtue, which Johnson claims was for Wollstonecraft an appropriation of the worst excesses of "female" sentimentality and an emasculation of British culture (7, 12). The masculinization of sentimentality leaves women two unacceptable positions: "the equivocal" or "the hyperfeminine." Though Johnson notes the overdetermination of both Wollstonecraft and her thought in such periodicals as the *Antijacobin Review and Magazine*, and in antijacobin novels such as Robert Bisset's *Modern Literature*, she does not take into account that, as such responses make clear, in the simple social act of writing Wollstonecraft would have occupied the position of a "woman" out-reasoning men--and "man." In other words, if the critiques of Wollstonecraft's thought are not simply interpretative distortions but *political* overdeterminations, Wollstonecraft's rhetorical

Wollstonecraft is markedly reserved, almost pessimistic (given that she is often read as a contradictory if predominantly emancipatory writer) about projecting a social world free of varying forms of discrimination: “if an intercourse were established between them [the poor and the rich], it would impart the only true pleasure that can be snatched in this land of shadows, this hard school of moral discipline” (*Political* 59).³ But she is not simply having trouble regulating an excess of humour. This impassioned criticism of a disposition toward the social through the figure of Burke reflects the more sanguine tone she adopted five years earlier in a letter to Everina Wollstonecraft, in which the same play of shadows attends the spectre of the transcendental:

The mind of man is formed to admire perfection and perhaps our longing after it and the pleasure we take in observing a shadow of it is a *faint line* of that Image that was first stamped on the soul--lost in sensual gratification many think of this world only--and tho’ we declare in general terms that there is no such thing as happiness on Earth yet it requires severe disappointments to make us forbear to seek it and be contented with endeavouring to prepare for a better state. (*Collected Letters* 87)

She does speak directly about transcendental fulfilment in the letter--but couched in a

response was political: to argue outside of categorical norms is to discredit her project, and to fall, by default into the second category, a being without reason. To argue within existing categories but to implode them from this position--and Wollstonecraft’s rhetoric in *Vindications of the Rights of Woman* often approaches a deconstructive strategy--is to appear neither equivocal nor hyperfeminine, but to shift a bipolarity of female subject positions, at the very least, into intersecting continuums of gender and politics, sentimentality and rationality, with a display of “feminist, reasoned sentiment.”

³ In contrast to Claudia Johnson’s view that Wollstonecraft found existing definitions of sensibility problematic but saw in discourses of sentimentality/sensibility an empowering possibility are Sarah Harasym, “Ideology and Self”; Anna Wilson, “Mary Wollstonecraft”; and Janet Todd, “The Unsex’d Females.” All argue that sentimentality was a disabling discourse for women.

language of desire (as the “consolations of Religion”) that establishes ultimate perfection *in relation to* the “only solid foundation” for experiencing it: significantly, a *reading* of shadows in a dark social text, a humility before its “faint lines.” But even this reference to the transcendental, as the undergirding of emotional sustenance for a reading of the elisions in the social text, is absent in the later, more politically situated reply to Burke.

For Wollstonecraft, then, this disposition toward the transcendental is more than an episode of malhumour. Clearly, she is not attempting to collapse the distinction between the “other” world and the world of bodies and desires, loss and toil. To do so would be to preempt the entire set of problems her texts repeatedly stage. In the formulation of “the moral and historical view” of the social as a problem of the conventionalization of manners lingers the question, and the tension, that orients her entire project: what version of “the social” will fill the name of history again? Her formulation of the retreat of morals from the social sphere--a retreat *sutured*, in Jacques-Alain Miller’s sense, by desecrated “manners,” whose operations both conceal *and* mark the place of an entire other network of possibilities for social relations--also bequeaths to Wollstonecraft the problem of naming the name of history. As she states in *View*, “civilization hitherto. . .has so weakened all the organs of the body-politic. . .that the very signification of justice has been lost sight of. . .” (*Political* 332). Her naming is an act which must be accomplished through reading the “empty” representations of the social world such that the fullness of the sign may reappear from within itself, from the material heart of its enervation. Thus, her problem is not one of staging a dialectic between manners and morals, historicity and

history, this world and other world, that would unite the two pairs of temporal coordinates in “the social”; rather, her writing suggests that the two terms are already united, incommodiously, in “the social.” The material content that would fill the empty historical form is at best a latent motility. History is neither wholly past, nor fully present, nor a textual representation of a future accomplishment, but a circulating of possibility in a debased morality. As she writes in *Historical and Moral View*, the example of the French Revolution reveals that without secular “ties of affection” there can not exist “anything like equality” to “consolidate” the social body (*Political* 340)--a guarded statement of emancipation at best. Unlike a staging of a dialectic in which two antagonistic historical figures must give way to one harmonious ideal, Wollstonecraft’s reading of revolutionary “time” gives no indication that she expects these pairs to function, as they must, *within* the world but without irrevocable, multiple tensions and fractures, irresolutions and reversals--without, that is, the spectre of a distinctly social propensity toward ruin. As her upbraiding of Burke’s “gratuitous” magnanimity in assuming the power of religious dispensation makes clear, Wollstonecraft will not claim such vision for herself; significantly, the actual contours of the “other” world will remain deliberately unthought throughout her texts. This is less an unfortunate oversight in her thought than a deliberate strategy in her writing: Wollstonecraft is canny enough to remain at once polemicist and philosopher, fictional and autobiographical writer, a female “text” essential to read in a male context. The trajectory of her work will take another orientation: her dilemma is how to call forward, in a praxis of writing, the spectre of transcendental history through

signs necessarily historical, necessarily already dense with emptiness, fragmentation, and ruination. Wollstonecraft's project, in fact, is to re-write the analogy between historical and transcendental such that "the social" is the mediation, the establishment of the relation between, these two versions of time: "the social" becomes the liminal site of their "proper" mutual articulation. Her real problem as a writer, then, is *how best to make use of the contours of a transcendental language that, of necessity, flows through social acts, an unanchored if living language sanctifying or desanctifying social relations.*

As this re-situating of her project suggests, in contrast to many recent scholars of Wollstonecraft, I will argue in what follows that her writing is not so much riven by essentialist/ constructivist contradictions as fuelled by such tensions. Interestingly, the metaphorizing of the social as "body" is one of the linguistic conduits through which Wollstonecraft affects the transfer of practices of transcendental justification from the aristocratic "tract" to the social contract. In particular I am interested in the emerging construction of a series of (temporally and causally) inter-generational and intra-generative (if internecine) figures for "the Revolution," whose very incommensurability--whose explicit polemics and implicit contradictions--produced for contemporaneous critics a significant site of late eighteenth-century British public debate about the public sphere's own re-formations. In asserting the importance of the French Revolution in this way, I mean to suggest that the textual "epiphenomena" that attended and followed the material events of the French Revolution not only extenuated the effects of the French Revolution, but also emerged, in the internally fissured contours of its tropes and syntax, as an

intertextual process of reading and writing--that is, as “an event” of and for thought itself. This self-reflexive figuring of the “French Revolution” produces, in its turn, the French Revolution as an “epiphenomenon” of British cultural practices in its transcoding of terms such as “freedom,” “liberty,” “virtue,” (for Wollstonecraft, “man” and “woman”), across the liminal geographical, cultural, and linguistic divide of the English channel. The transvaluation of the events of the French Revolution into British cultural and linguistic categories also transfigures the discrete boundaries of the “originating” event, such that British writings about the French Revolution assert an autonomy from the material events in such practices of self-reflexive cultural appropriation are founded. This relative autonomy, if it renders elusive historically validated determinations of relations that “produce” causality, or the dual relations of writer to text and text to socio-historical context, yet produces the conditions for a socio-cultural reevaluation of what formerly were formative concepts and practices.

The shifts in figuring the French Revolution Wollstonecraft introduces into the British national imaginary and against a text such as Burke’s *Reflections* make this writing practice apparent. For both Burke and Wollstonecraft, the events in France are an occasion to reflect on, and exert an influence over, British attitudes toward the principles there displayed. But for Burke the Revolution provides the occasion to remember and reinforce basic principles of political and cultural life in Britain; for Wollstonecraft the Revolution presents an opportunity to recall occluded components of those basic principles and to re-member the limbs of a social memory such occlusions have truncated.

Burke reminds his readers that “Society is indeed a contract” (194), a principle not asserted or reconceptualized but transgressed in the “monstrous tragi-comic” (94) scene that is the French Revolution. Indeed, Burke raises the observance of the “principle” of the social contract to a transcendental duty of conservation when he figures its temporality as an extension of continuity across the entire social memory, a partnership analogous to “the great primeval contract of eternal society”: “As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born” (194-95). Floating through the social contract but lost in the present’s forgetting of tradition are the honorable bodies of the future as well as the past. Burke represents the Revolution as a disturbance in and of the social memory--of the social coordinates orienting the existential conditions that extend across all human endeavour long past, partially present, and yet to come--and, as such, a sin against the eternal, and, more tellingly, against the eternal *in time*, the “fixed compact sanctioned” by the “inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place” (195). To remember one’s place in Burke’s cosmology is to recollect that as merely “the municipal corporation of that universal kingdom” humanity at large has “no right wholly to separate and tear asunder” the contract of “analogy,” the linguistic (and material) structure that stabilizes the relation of “secular” to “eternal society” (195). The penalty for forgetting this “analogy” is made all the more persuasive in his parallel lists of appositions: “outlawed, cast forth, and exiled,” those who do not heed his deposition of the seditious

substitute for “reason, and order, and peace, and virtue, and fruitful penitence” a fractious world of “madness, discord, vice, confusion, and unavailing sorrow” (195). The “choice,” for Burke, is which “sentence” of contrition will be the least incommodious binding of secular and universal. Wollstonecraft’s sharp divergence from Burke’s “mere” observances begins at the semantic level of her title. If the evocation of history in her title suggests that the figures she deploys will speak themselves, verisimilitude also accrues to the very different “moral view” Wollstonecraft will espouse through those figures. In this seemingly simple contrast in the two writers’ titles, the British re-figuration of the revolution already asserts its autonomy from the events which occasion the two works: paradoxically, the meaning of the French Revolution is the collective content of the British social memory it has, or will have, disturbed. Although written (shortly) after Burke’s *Reflections*, her writings on the French Revolution is no detached collection of reflections: Wollstonecraft situates her text foremost as a “historical view” of contemporaneous events, signifying a more “objective” distance from the events than Burke’s “reflections” suggest while tacitly placing her practice of remembering within an ongoing revolt. She makes this extension of the time of the revolution explicit when she contends that “a new spirit has gone forth, to organize the body-politic; and where is the criterion to be found, to estimate the means, by which this spirit can be confined, now enthroned in the hearts of half the inhabitants of the globe?” (307). With the French Revolution, the geographically borderless body-politic has given half-life, fragmented material form, to the spectre of its transcendence. Consequently, Wollstonecraft’s “history” of the social contract differs

from that represented by Burke. Within the present social contract, Burke would evoke into the social consciousness the memory of its past *and future* with the self-evidentiary status of the copula, in the most basic linguistic structure of predication, the very assertion of uncontested and uncontestable knowledge: “*Society is indeed a contract.*” But Burke will nuance this “unquestionable” predication with the insertion of a malingering doubt, a suggestion that recollection is necessary: “*Society is indeed a contract.*” That is, despite current events, despite acts that threaten the remembrance of this contract in the social body, society remains a contract. But the potential for immanent loss, the ghost of an ultimate ruination, has been raised, since the continuity of time itself will be lost if the social aberration is not remembered as aberration. For Burke, it is not the transcendent which is a ghost; it is the present which is a curious kind of venial sin that, in deforming the continuity of the chivalric past and future, threatens to saturate itself with vulgarity, tantamount to banishing its own spirit. Burke implies that passive forgetting, a disturbance of social memory not recognized as such, makes the spirit of history a ghost in the social world if not, he implies, in the non-temporal one. Temporality strips itself of the non-temporal, but it does not thereby eradicate the non-temporal. The present is touched by the all too vulgar hand of a materiality that stands poised to void the trace of the transcendental altogether.

It is as an intervention in the social effects of *this* rhetoric, against Burke as both writer and image in the late eighteenth-century social imaginary, that Wollstonecraft *must* deploy a meliorist rhetoric. In a direct address to the reader, Wollstonecraft effaces

completely the “French Revolution” and focuses her remarks on the British reception of the Revolution’s historical figures. “We ought not to be discouraged” she says, from attempting to simplify the laws of our country, “because no country has yet been able to do it” (344). The past of the social contract is not yet, for it has never had a present. In fact “the present” must devise means for taking advantage of its unique vantage point in historical time: “it seems clear, that manners and government have been in a continual state of improvement, and that the extension of knowledge, a truth capable of demonstration, was never at any period so general as at present” (345). In her antagonistic relation to Burke’s figures for the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft’s process of reading the text of history, then, is concomitantly a practice of remembering *and* of refiguring memory itself:

When society was first regulated, the laws could not be adjusted so as to take in the future conduct of it’s [sic] members, because the faculties of man are unfolded and perfected by the improvements made by society: consequently the regulations established as circumstances required were very imperfect. What then is to hinder man, at each epoch of civilization, from making a stand, and new modelling the materials, that have been hastily thrown into a rude mass, which time alone has consolidated and rendered venerable? (*Political* 305)

Defamiliarized normative determinations become resituated as desynthesized coordinates of memory. Wollstonecraft will defamiliarize memory as operation and as content by reading “the rude mass,” the gaps and fissures of the discursive matrices; but she will read the material intertextuality of her discursive context as a multiform site of creative potentialities, and thus transform writing into a reorientation of time itself. This

alternative history, as yet unaccomplished, must yet be remembered as an object for the social consciousness: Wollstonecraft's writing will recall this object for the social consciousness. The above figuring of memory is clear, too, in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which Wollstonecraft applies the logic of reconstituting memory in a related political context: "The *rights* of humanity have been thus confined to the male line from Adam downwards" (168). In the *View* women's particular issues are less in the foreground, but Wollstonecraft does remain consistent with her stance in *Rights of Woman*. In fact, as I will argue in greater detail later, the subtexts of the *View* not only establish a clear continuity among her varied texts, but also strengthen the historical argument that subtends *Vindications of the Rights of Woman*, lending the situatedness of her more explicitly feminist critique a meta-historical systematicity and her historical reading of the revolution an empowering topicality in its creation of a practicum of social agency. As Burke and Wollstonecraft's contrasting representations of revolutionary men (and women's) agency suggest, for Wollstonecraft women must be remembered in and as participants of, and contributors to, the social. In this operation of memory, the normative determination is a social practice reconstituted as an object of consciousness. The writing of its formative role in founding "context" then establishes the limit for a revisionist or revolutionary re-reading and re-coding of historical "context." In this process, textual production itself becomes a *praxis*--but, in the eighteenth century, a social re-direction of *memory* divorced of Marxist (and more specifically, Leninist) investment of historical necessity in the term *praxis*. For as Wollstonecraft makes clear, there are no historical

guarantees sanctioning the embodiment of the social “spirit.” From this perspective the precipitating event--the French Revolution--becomes a socio-psychic version of Freud’s “screen-memory” for a process of concretizing and syncretizing as the “formative event” an articulation of the historically necessary. The French Revolution, whose signification was overdetermined for and by writers who chose to comment upon its proliferation and magnification of tensions within the determination of “the social,” becomes for Wollstonecraft a means for first re-suturing in the present an occluded past, and then remembering a “fallen” present precipitated by that “ruin” of social memory through the combination of “degeneracy of morals, with polished manners.”

But Wollstonecraft’s texts, as a staging of multiple strategies for re-constituting the social, are by no means mere participants in an eighteenth-century socio-psychic economy of nostalgia, if by that term we recall Raymond William’s notion of a generalized lamentation for the passing of the object of transcendental history from its disclosure in consciousness and, consequently, its visibility in enchainning world-historical events as a single articulation of historical necessity. Through the images she produces in her reading of the events of the rebellion, and the transposition of its effects into the British text of history, a confluence of thematic tendencies or matrices disrupt the coherence of the “historical” in the text, thereby potentially problematizing the veracity of the moral interpretation as itself a factual rendering of the forgotten morality of history. Purportedly dominated by its status as a “historical” text, the remembering of the (f)acts of the French Revolution *are* disfigured, thereby threatening also to place the status of the moral text

under erasure. Factual, singular history, and with it morality in history are lost in the transformation of French acts into British syntax, an insight not lost to eighteenth-century interpreters, as suggested by the anxiety attending contesting representations of the actual events. But if teleological history is fissured at the level of the text's content, it can in part be recovered in its very fragmentation at the level of the text's form. The multiplicity of its genres, its internecine textuality, suggest concomitant sites of historical productions and reversals. Wollstonecraft's textual enactment of an operation of memory that revivifies the social isolates what appear to be contradictory epistemological assumptions both disruptive and supportive of her emancipatory project. But she sets her insight less on attainment of ultimate goals than on improvement in present conditions.

Wollstonecraft's texts, then, are by no means lacking in self-reflexive complexities, and we should beware of reading any one of her texts as first and foremost its own subtext. To do so is to be guided by the assumption of an autonomy of the text in its relation to an authorial presence, and thus to assume that the text signifies beyond authorial intention, a notion with which I am in sympathy and which is already thematized, as we have seen in Sterne and Blake's work, in the eighteenth century. But it is to be guided in a particular way. To read the text as its own subtext is also to "find" the writer's unthematized "contradictions" *for her* and to give them secure signifying designations in the categorical constructs of an analytical practice. This interpretative methodology is a critical commonplace in readings of Wollstonecraft; to varying extent this reading strategy is a mode of re-inscribing little more than the appositeness of a

critical methodology. But this reading practice entails a chiasmic logic of disclosure: if the identification of “contradictions” of necessity performs the work of “managing” them, de- and re-contextualizing a writer’s gaps by translating them through the conceptual corridors of a differently structured discursive language, their potential for effecting a disruption of the unvoiced contradictions of the current methodology decreases. If the need for “placing” Wollstonecraft’s “contradictions” seems essential in the sheer density of rhetorical registers her texts routinely employ (suggesting another limitation of our own categorical imperatives, which reduce readings of Wollstonecraft’s polyvocality to the search for a semiotics of style), we might begin the work of re-constructing, of shifting, our own categories of interpretation if we remember that her texts always retain a political as well as a meliorist, a literary as well as a didactic dimension; and to *read* the texts is to synthesize as little as possible the variety of demands these widely differing subject and genre positions place on the reading subject.⁴

The practice of reading I am attempting to articulate, as well as the distortions

⁴ Mitzi Myers makes two crucial points: “Since female models [of reform] characteristically operate in terms of strategically redefining and rescripting traditional markers, the linguistic surface of such sexual pronouncements must be carefully scrutinized for imperfect integrations, submerged conflicts, covert messages” (202). Although the attribution of “strategic” redefinition and reinscription to women’s representations is indistinguishable from a “man’s writing”--unless Myers is suggesting that women’s language must be more subtle relative to men’s discourse--her methodology for allowing (women’s) texts idiosyncratic representative strategies approaches my own, and at the very least suggests the need for alternative reading practices. As we shall see, the contrast between Wollstonecraft and Blake’s readings of *Paradise Lost* seems, on one level, to support Myers’ claims.

embedded in the historical text by the reading practice I describe above, can be clarified with reference to an analysis that draws closest to my own. Orrin Wang's "The Other Reasons" concurs that Wollstonecraft has been "trapped" by reading strategies from "even the most sympathetic readings"⁵ (130), and proposes an alternate reading practice that removes Wollstonecraft's writing from the reason versus imagination binary in which critics have (dis)figured her. Basing his reading on the *Rights of Woman*, Wang suggests that the text is rightly governed by "complex relationships" that make themselves evident as thematic and rhetorical diremptions; but Wollstonecraft--or more properly, "Wollstonecraft's text," for Wang is working within the Yale deconstruction tradition that tends to autonomize the text if it deautonomizes the writer--exhibits a reflexivity too often occluded by current modes of scholarship. Wang's next sentence is crucial: "Far from being a text blind to the limits of its own political and didactic discourse, *The Rights of Woman* carries out an ideological critique of its own teleological and millennial aspirations, precisely through its dissolution of the semantic identities that separate reason from passion" (131). In other words, Wang will read the text of the second *Vindication* as its own subtext based on the assumption that "reason" and "passion" are diametrically

⁵ Critics and texts he notes are Cora Kaplan ("Wild Nights"), who argues that Wollstonecraft's privileging of male reason over female sentiment exhibits a fear of the female body; Mary Poovey (*Proper Lady*), who, in Wang's estimation, feels that Wollstonecraft is, largely, blind to the limits of the discourses structuring her life and her writing; and Mary Jacobus ("Difference of View") who argues that Wollstonecraft's "madness" is the madness of all language. Wang points out that subtending all three of these interpretations is the premise that Wollstonecraft is largely blind to the limits of the discourses structuring her life and writing (see Wang, n. 6, 146).

related, a critical product of de Manian literary deconstruction, and Wollstonecraft becomes a figure of the romantic (individualistic) imaginary. Through this strategy of collapsing reason and passion Wang presents Wollstonecraft as a thoroughly (post)modern, if not quite post-structural, feminist. However, reading Wollstonecraft through the eighteenth-century context that formed her and that thoroughly informs her texts yields a far different picture. Wang's categorical assertions do not and cannot account for the signifying phenomena of sentimentality across the century. For in the sentimental "traditions" upon which Wollstonecraft's texts draw, the reason/passion binary is already "deconstructed"--or more accurately, sentimentality renders reason and passion so malleable that their mutual displacement is precluded. The reason/passion opposition Wang's Wollstonecraft defers, thereby dismantling the coordinates of her "teleological and millennial aspirations" as well as man/woman designations, misconstrues the exceptionally social thrust of her project as well as occludes a significant dimension of the text's rhetorical economy: in the sheer intertextuality of its eighteenth-century applications, "sentimentality" allows the teleological to circulate in an overwhelming variety of ways. Thus, Wang, too, substitutes an analytic form for historical context. In using "context" in this manner, however, I want to issue a caveat: "context" is not to be understood in its common application in social science research as a (transcendental) ground of an empirico-existential mode of understanding. "Context" as I am using it signifies no more than the attempt to mark, through the positing of a relational structure, a reading of the shifts, gaps, re-positions produced by the coordinates of that (posited) structure. Context,

then, does not lead to a grounding of the reading methodology in an assumed saturation of phenomena that everywhere reflects the naturality of its designation.

To produce a reading from this notion of context, then, we should read the text less as its own subtext, less as an uneasy pairing of a two signifying dimensions--a constative dimension which purports to express an apodictic meaning and a performative which subtends, subverts, but does not wholly displace the meaning-effect produced by the constative--than as a means for Wollstonecraft to extend to the social a reading practice in which the reader must willingly dislocate her "discursivities," and consequently through which she seeks *potential* across the signs that compose shifting articulations of eighteenth-century discursivity. As the brief contrast between Burke and Wollstonecraft makes clear, Wollstonecraft of necessity employed teleological figures, in much the same reflexive way as Burke, if for vastly different ends. But Wollstonecraft identified this practice as a means to resituate a writing of history that was indissolubly wedded to social praxis, and that makes it markedly differently from both Burke's text and Blake's *Milton*. For Blake, writing must recover if not the loss, then the contours of the loss of history; for Wollstonecraft, writing can uncover the loss, and "the social" can "recover" the loss precisely by working to make it a past that is the site of a turn to the future. This turn is accomplished in the present acts of the social reconstruction of its own body.

Implicit in thinking "the social" through the metaphor of the body--a practice evident not only in Wollstonecraft's *Historical and Moral View* but also throughout the linguistic tissues of late eighteenth-century discursive formations--is the assumption that

the temporality in which history unfolds--or through which the transcendental ground of history once flowed--is a materially saturated site, increasingly indistinguishable from the utterly secular time in which the body has the potential to proliferate monstrously, producing, as in the case of *Milton*, the spectre of a history beyond individual or social intention, beyond re-membering *itself* it seems. Hovering just beyond the language of Wollstonecraft's diagnosis of the social body as "poisoned" by the continuity of a degeneracy of morals and polished manners, however, is "self-reflexion" as a necessary treatment for both the individual and the social/historical, a prescription for which Wollstonecraft's analytical language represents the first course. In fact, Wollstonecraft's formulation suggests that the "cure" is already underway in the rhetoric of a diagnosis. This is suggested, too, in the final pages of the *View* in Wollstonecraft's identification of an autogeneration of health, combining medical/physiological, political, philosophical, aesthetic, and historiographical discourse. If in inviting her readers with her to "cast our eyes over the history of man" she finds France diseased (and by her own implied logical extension, Britain), she also suggests the cure for which she will labour throughout her remaining textual production: as in

medicine there is a species of complaint. . . which works its own cure, and leaving the body healthy, gives an invigorated tone to the system, so there is in politics: and whilst the agitation of it's [sic] regeneration continues, the excrementitious humours exuding from the contaminated body will excite a general dislike and contempt for the nation; and it is only the philosophical eye, which looks into nature and weighs the consequences of human actions, that will be able to discern the cause, which has produced so many dreadful effects. (387)

But why is this possible for Wollstonecraft? Through Hobbes and Berkeley, Locke and Hume, Warburton and Sterne, language is at best a symptom, at worst a cause, of a dysfunction in aetiology. Similarly, how does Wollstonecraft constitute writing as “cure,” where Blake seems, in *Milton*, to have abandoned any designation of language as restoration of both the principle and practice of a social or individual identity? I will make repeated returns to Wollstonecraft’s scene of the cure above--its construction of operations of individual bodies and the social body by way of mutual interpellation, its representation of writing as autodidaction and as social memory, its foregrounding of the eighteenth-century search for the “philosophical eye”--but through isolating, as did Wollstonecraft, certain discursive silences in the social contract. I will attempt to answer why this scene is possible for Wollstonecraft precisely by attempting to identify the methodology by which she re-defined a social memory through its own “forgotten” or unheeded analogies; across her contemporaries’ overlooked signs and practices of social cohesion, I will attempt to suggest how Wollstonecraft analysed the intertextuality of a multitude of discourses upon which she routinely draws in her writing practices. To see how Wollstonecraft asserts not only the social body but a particular social body as the proper receptacle of history, then, requires a seemingly Shandyeian effort of textual circumlocution: in reading the intertextuality of Wollstonecraft’s context, the subject matter and style of her own texts becomes far more apparent. I will begin this process with a comparison of Wollstonecraft’s writing position and Blake’s in *Milton*, which will further re-situate Wollstonecraft’s “writing as praxis,” and will then suggest ways in which

her writing makes use of her social context for a re-direction of the social.

Blake's *Milton* refracts in a particular manner the conundrum of identity that I have been arguing is a recurring series of questions throughout the Augustan period, and that surfaces most clearly and insistently in the problem of "individuality" and its relation to "the social." If in *Milton* Blake offers a mythologized, if violent, version of the difficult process of individuation as itself extra- and intra-human, and, therefore, as the causally indeterminate (re)creation of the lived repressions and oppressions that constitute the social world, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* present aspects of these problems from what often seems an entirely different analysis and application of the rhetorical traditions she shared, temporally if not always temperamentally, with Blake. Like Wollstonecraft in her two *Vindications*, Blake in the Lambeth books seems preoccupied with the politicized rhetoric of the French Revolution--a preoccupation both he and Wollstonecraft shared with enough writers to effect a cultural revolution in Britain in the early 1790s, a revolution that was to continue to the end of the eighteenth century.⁶ Blake was, of course, aware of Wollstonecraft's work, and in 1790 contributed to it directly with the five etchings included in *The Female Reader*, Wollstonecraft's own contribution to the proliferation of conduct books in the

⁶ In her introductory essay to *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the Revolution Controversy*, Marilyn Butler sees in "the working-class radical movement" and the "Romantic movement" two complementary if sublimated developments into the nineteenth-century of the ideals of the Revolution debate (1). While I do not wish to take issue with Butler's suggestive thesis here, my primary interest is in the more direct discussion of "the social" in Wollstonecraft's work.

latter part of the century.⁷ Similarly, as both an intimate of the social circle of thinkers, artists, and political radicals whose nominal centre was the publisher Joseph Johnson, and as one of Henry Fuseli's friends and admirers from as early as 1787, Blake undoubtedly knew much of Wollstonecraft's work and life.⁸ Despite such similarities in their social lives and political beliefs, even a cursory reading of both writers' texts reveals considerable differences in the construction of the critical persona through which each would effect a cultural revolution. Certainly the two writers did not share class affiliations and locations; notwithstanding, the temporalities that emerge in each writer's situating of the writing/speaking persona will clarify some of the divergent rhetorical techniques with which each writer engaged the events of the French Revolution.

A tributary of Blake scholarship continues to investigate his debt to Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* and, more often, *Vindication of the*

⁷ The relative merit of this early work has received some attention in recent scholarship. Mary Poovey argues that Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* did not break significantly with the eighteenth-century tradition of female conduct-books (*Proper Lady* 55). Gary Kelly states that *Thoughts* is more ambitious than it appears, since Wollstonecraft's revised construction of "woman" counsels implicitly the collapse of gender distinctions in educational policy (see *Revolutionary Feminism* 30-1).

⁸ As Nelson Hilton remarks, contemporaries of Blake were aware of his "infatuation" with Fuseli. "By the early 1790s, Blake considered himself a close friend to both [Johnson and Fuseli]: when his close friend John Flaxman went to Italy in 1787, Blake recalled, 'Fuseli was giv'n to me for a season'" ("An Original Story" 70; Blake quoted from Erdman 707). Frederick Tatham, another intimate of Blake, reports that "Blake was more fond of Fuseli, than any other man on earth" ("An Original Story" 70; Tatham quoted from Bentley, *Records* 531).

Rights of Woman.⁹ Much of this work figures Wollstonecraft as the intellectual antecedent of Blake's more challenging philosophic ethos; Wollstonecraft emerges as a shadowy (pre)figure of Blake's more discerning revelations and more satisfying if complex constructions of femininity--in inter-textual terms, Wollstonecraft's two *Vindications* are the textual Oothoon to Blake's Orcian efforts.¹⁰ In such arguments Blake's work becomes, ironically, a more adequate vehicle for the re-birth of the figure "woman" and the social practices that constitute it than Wollstonecraft's "revolution in female manners." Literary analysis asserts its continuity with the very oppressive practices it seeks to displace: in such arguments, self-reflexive critique runs the risk of becoming little more than a thinly historicized version of the "critical cross-dressing" Elaine Showalter identified with such trenchancy in her reading of the sudden appearance in academic criticism of a radical sensitivity (and sensibility) known as the "male feminist."¹¹ With a bit of coaching from and in the texts of Blake, Wollstonecraft's ideas attain their fullest

⁹ See, for example, Nelson Hilton, "An Original Story"; Judith Lee, "Ways of Their Own"; Michael Ackland, "The Embattled Sexes"; Dennis M. Welch, "Blake's Response"; Robert N. Essick, "The Figure in the Carpet"; Morton D. Paley, *William Blake*, 27; Mona Wilson, *Life*, pp. 44-6; D.V. Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, 243; D.C. Gilham, *Blake's Contrary States*, 97; Henry H. Wasser, "Notes on the *Visions*," 292.

¹⁰ See especially Ackland's "Embattled Sexes."

¹¹ Elaine Showalter's "Critical Cross-Dressing; Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year" is a predominantly cultural rather than historical analysis of the phenomenon; see also Belinda Kremer's "Learning to Say No: Keeping Feminist Research for Ourselves," and Kathleen L. Barry's "Tootsie Syndrome, or 'We Have Met the Enemy and They are Us'."

articulation (or dis-articulation). From this perspective, Blake's re-interpretation and re-direction of Wollstonecraft's thought constitutes him as an eighteenth-century instantiation of the "male feminist" phenomena, a social critic whose express "sensitivity" to women's distinct critical positions is indistinguishable from building his own reputation "on the back" of Wollstonecraft's key social insights.¹² Such a reading, however, disempowers Wollstonecraft as an effect of the "critical insight" it attributes to Blake as a unique genius, a creative interpreter of Wollstonecraft's thought.

In fact, one could argue that with his "turn" to a revision of the detrimental social, political, and personal affects of Milton's literary work, Blake seems to abandon, supercede, or, at the very least, to sublimate into a literary/textual form the explicitly political, revolutionary rhetoric struggling toward clarity in the Lambeth books, and with it the implicit assumption of all attempts at political intervention: the social effectivity of its performative language. In effect, "the political" at once constitutes the (social) speaking situation and a personalized, individualized "situatedness" as that linguistic and social horizon in which language can assert a causal relation to the formation of "the social." Like a good many critical positions on Blake's texts, however, the argument that Blake's *Milton* constitutes a disavowal of the expressly "political" import of his earlier texts suggests its inverse. That is, Blake's strategy in reading "the political" (i.e., a desultory

¹² Although this is not a line of argument in *Poetic Form in Blake's Milton*, Susan Fox does identify significant problems with critics' attribution of "sensitivity" to Blake's reading of oppressive social and symbolic structures in eighteenth-century figurations of "woman" and society.

style coupled with a historically-situated analysis and a temporally located affectivity) into an “aesthetic” realm more self-reflexive toward its own atemporality is merely a means to remind his readers that the emerging division between political and literary language is itself an institutionalized practice for forgetting a significant dimension of the political. This forgetting is accomplished by naturalizing the “disinterestedness” of an epistemological categorization that separates literature from politics--in the eighteenth century, a sphere of spectatorial distance and detachment from worldly desire, in opposition to “the vanity of human wishes” and loss of self within this world, occasioned by that near other-worldly combination of need and greed dramatized so influentially by Samuel Johnson at mid-century. If the concept of “the book,” in its relation of “form” and “content,” is defamiliarized in this strategy for re-thinking normative categories and models of understanding, the act of reading (and writing) can also be understood as both atemporal and historically situated. This reading practice calls into question the putative disinterestedness of literary forms of address at the same time that it suggests in the politically-situated text a survival of an atemporal dimension of interpretation that was the very foundation of the repressive practices the reading/writing practice was to banish.

In Romantic scholarship Blake is commonly “recognized” as having been one of the most astute readers of this dilemma. The Lambeth books seems preoccupied with understanding, from the distance that a “prophetic” vantage-point offered, how the revolutionary rhetoric was affecting the reconstruction of contemporary society not only in England (*Europe: A Prophecy*) but also in France (*The French Revolution*) and

America (*America: A Prophecy*). In constructing a distanciated temporal frame for the critical consciousness (the rhetorical gestures of a prophetic voice), Blake, like Wollstonecraft, was preoccupied with how the rhetoric of the French Revolution functioned in the present. In effect, Blake's trope of "the individual" who from his/her present social context speaks a future collectivity creates a temporal loop in the present, in which the future is possessed in the present as having already passed; thus, prophecy creates a temporal and spatial distance that seeks to authorize cultural critique by creating a temporal and spatial remove from "within" the present. The affect of such a construction is that it isolates not only the prophet but also the self-reflexive reader from his/her present such that that present can be remembered and reconstituted (i.e., the social "re-membered") from within itself with the authority of a temporally de-subjectivized (if not quite omniscient or transcendent) vantage-point. John Mullan sees an analogous movement in the sentimental novelists' use of this temporality: the genre tends to "position each private reader as the exceptional connoisseur of commendable sympathies" thereby constructing, within the intersections of moral philosophy and sensibility, a "reader" as a rarefied commodity of self-reflexion on the "social" body (*Sentiment and Sociability* 13).

Blake's curious temporality and agency for this space thematizes the disjunction between the temporally conditioned reader of the historical (the prophet) and the atemporality in the prophetic distancing of the present in a particular linguistic performative structure that makes discernible the structure of history. Blake's "prophet" positions the past *within* the present and represents a distanciation of that de-sublimated

past/present in an act of consciousness. As Angela Esterhammer has noted, Blake's attention to both aspects of temporal positioning in the speech act of the prophecy, his thematizing of this dehiscence in the performative space of the prophetic, makes his figure's speech an ironic performance.¹³ It is this figure of time, with its complication of temporal succession and its propensity to implode the nexus of historical progression, the punctum or succession of discrete nodes of time, that anchors (post)modern critics' identification of Blake's theoretical "strength" and Wollstonecraft's relative philosophical "weakness."¹⁴ Blake's act of textual self-reflexivity is a recognition that the past is never the simple past; rather, the past is *made* "past," differentiated from the present upon which it sometimes weighs--in Marx's provocative formulation in "The Grundrisse," "like a nightmare"--by a continual act of consciousness which is, foremost, a disclosure of the conditions of world formation. In Blake's texts this act of continual self-disclosure is, in effect, the precursor to Freud's "unconscious," an inverse of Freud's intra-psychic determination of the storehouse of images with which the mind constitutes itself in all of its operations of memory, from "repression" to "sublimation," production of "screen memory" to disclosure of the traumatic kernel of experience for which the screen memory

¹³ Angela Esterhammer, *Creating States*: "The visionary poet, in particular, stakes the effectiveness of his or her utterance on a claim to divine inspiration. . . in Blake's work the conflict between inspired voice and the Austinian performative becomes the subject of ironic reflection" (11,40).

¹⁴ For a forceful and widely influential critique of the "punctum," the "self identity of the now" as "point" or "source-point," see Jacques Derrida's "Signs and the Blink of an Eye," an exposition of Husserlian phenomenology (*Speech and Phenomena* 61).

remains an indelible mark. The dialectic of forgetting/remembering which constitutes either intelligibility or traumatic disclosure occurs not as an intra-psychic phenomenon but as an indeterminacy in the operation of memory, visible in the eighteenth-century writers' repetitious staging of gaps between "the individual" and "the social."

But as Locke's epistemology of understanding makes clear, with memory now a determining ground for the act of self-reflection, and further, undifferentiated from thought itself, the Aristotelian problem of active and passive memory asserts itself in the material formation of the "world." For this reason the act of critique can recall a forgotten content of social memory as the foundation of an active regeneration of the present. In a more Freudian formulation, the structure of the unconscious, in other words, is *located in the object*, or, more precisely, inheres in the analytical strand between the subject and the object, "the individual" and "the social." "Memory" becomes both a content retrieved and the act (increasingly, of social critique) that constitutes the content whose form, when initially retrieved, represents not itself but, increasingly, *something other than itself*--whether temporally, in the past that remains both prime mover and immovable in the present (or in its distance from the active present), or spatially, as the simultaneous inhabitation of a "single" body by two or more identities, as is the case in the Blake's *Milton*.

Blake and Wollstonecraft grasped the social implications of this insight, but they put it to work in vastly different and equally provocative ways. At its most basic level, this difference asserts itself in the predominant tropes with which each writer represents

the difficult intellectual labour of his/her project: whereas Blake often represents the process of revolutionary intellectual work through metaphors of physical strife--as we have seen in *Milton*, the "emergence" of a contradictory personal and textual identity is nothing short of a corporeal violence projected and protracted *as* text; similarly, Blake considers the process of intellectual activity a kind of mental warfare, or, as he put it in the "Preface" to *Milton*, as "Mental Fight" (95)--Wollstonecraft tends to adopt a far different attitude toward those she views as intellectual adversaries: as she admits in a letter to Imlay, she is "half in love with Rousseau," who in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* becomes, much more explicitly than Milton, a powerful symbol for the perpetuation of an unjust society.¹⁵ The construction of the means by which the dominant discursive structures perpetuate oppressive social conditions and suggest possible writing positions of cultural and political critique finds a different focus in each author's work. Concerned primarily with representations of "woman," Wollstonecraft centres her critique on the construction of femininity through a number of genres and discourses: philosophical texts, conduct books for both men and women, travel writing, autobiography, sentimentality, physiology, picturesque practices and theories, commonwealth rhetorics of emancipation, and devotional literature, among the most significant; Blake draws on an equal number of discourses in the traditions that form his linguistic and social context, but tends to sublimate them in poetic utterance. Part of the difference is due, of course, to the power

¹⁵ For a discussion of the role of reason in Wollstonecraft's reading of Rousseau, see Melissa A. Butler, "Wollstonecraft Versus Rousseau."

of gender formations and their discursive reinforcement in the formalizations of sexed aesthetic practices. Blake, for example, may have enjoyed a subject position relatively “free” of the non-subjectivity women endured; thus, through Blake’s subject position the sublimation of these individual discourses that constitute the poetry appear a statement or performance of that autonomy. Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, had no such autonomy on which to rely, unless she could create it herself. If throughout his poetry Blake was to argue that subjectivity was always the subject of a prior inscription (thereby abrogating his autonomy), ironically, he did so from a socially-constructed and sanctioned position of relative (gender) authority. Following this logic, Wollstonecraft could not relinquish a subjectivity that, as a woman, she did not possess. As she states in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,

Men are allowed by moralists to cultivate, as Nature directs, different qualities, and assume the different characters, that the same passions, modified almost to infinity, give to each individual. A virtuous man may have a choleric or a sanguine disposition, be gay or grave, unreprieved; be firm till he is almost overbearing, or, weakly submissive, have no will or opinion of his own; but all women are to be levelled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance. (*Political Writings* 177)

In effect, we can see Wollstonecraft perform a diametrically opposed critique of subject positions in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which, quite possibly, she re-creates the nominal subject position accorded to women in order to invest it with significance, or unsettles it in order to create an entirely new discourse of sensibility/rationality in its

place.¹⁶ If sentimentality and the forms of writing that constitute it are predominantly “woman’s” sphere of influence and knowledge, scholars of the eighteenth-century--as well as a considerable number of feminist theorists and historians whose primary scholarly focus is not eighteenth-century literature--continue to identify Wollstonecraft’s work as the inauguration of a modern feminist critique, and credit her with the founding of an argumentative style distinctly “associative,” “a woman’s writing” that yet seeks to destabilize the dominant categories in which gender practices traditionally have been understood. The surface affinities of the texts of Blake and Wollstonecraft aside, Wollstonecraft works to delineate a socially viable form of reason (i.e., one that gives to women subjectivity and social agency) which Blake’s textual productions sometimes explicitly thematize (*Book of Thel*) but do not admit. If Blake’s response to the social oppression around him is to mark the extent of his own conspiracy, to the point of troubling his own manifest desire for a tenable revolt against it, Wollstonecraft re-works Enlightenment models of the subject in order to modify the predominant categories. In fact, many commentators sympathetic to Wollstonecraft’s project have found this rift between the revolutionary and the recapitulatory aspects of her writing an insurmountable contradiction. This reading of Wollstonecraft disempowers and empowers her in equal

¹⁶ Two of the most complex and fruitful of more recent readings of Wollstonecraft have argued that Wollstonecraft does have a particular set of relations in mind when she argues against structures that misprison female subjectivity. For an example of the former see Gary Kelly, 107-139, esp. p. 109; for the latter see Claudia L. Johnson, esp. pp. 23, 30, 40.

proportion; Wollstonecraft goes far in her analysis of contextual factors in gender constructions, but not far enough in disinterring gender from its biological and transcendental justifications. In such readings Wollstonecraft's texts remain caught in what Elizabeth Grosz has recently called the dual commitments of many feminist theories: "the debate between feminisms of equality and feminisms of difference" (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 47). But as I have been arguing, more empowering readings of Wollstonecraft's intellectual activity are possible. As Syndy Conger notes, Wollstonecraft had recognized "the power of language to structure the minds and the realities of the people who speak it" (*Mary* 116). Wollstonecraft's effort, I am suggesting, can help "devise appropriate criteria" Grosz calls for in the continuing assessment of feminism's dual project (*Space* 47). For the remainder of the chapter I will explore ways in which Wollstonecraft "read" her context, and created a distinctly textual form of social activism as memory.

Wollstonecraft, like Blake, was preoccupied with the revolutionary rhetoric and its affectivity in Britain; but, in contrast to Blake, she worked to effect a cultural revolution in the immediate present. If Sterne had uncovered the difficult temporality in Tristram's autobiographical predicament, ultimately questioning the temporality of the causal "individual" in the social contract, Blake had disclosed the same problem in the temporality of the "historical" contract. Wollstonecraft was not unaware of either of these problems for a re-theorizing of agency in social change. If the French Revolution provided her with the example of a people's demand for significant political and social

change, it also suggested to her that the form the revolution had taken in France was not a social transition without troubling remainders of the “ruin” it sought to displace. In *View*, Wollstonecraft allies writing with remembering, critical text with memory, when she adapts the techniques of the sentimental novel to represent the affects of the revolution in

France:...if my pen almost bound with eagerness to record the day, that levelled the Bastille with the dust, making the towers of despair tremble to their base; the recollection, that still the abbey is appropriated to hold the victims of revenge and suspicion, palsies the hand that would fain do justice to the assault, which tumbled into heaps of ruins walls that seemed to mock the resistless force of time.--Down fell the temple of despotism; but--despotism has not been buried in it's [sic] ruins! (342).

Whereas Blake's *Milton* thematizes this problematic temporality and Sterne's text satirizes “the individual” as a category (and autobiography as a genre) of, and for, forgetting the materiality of the temporal world, Wollstonecraft's texts would de-thematize it by putting it to rhetorical use for revolutionary ends. Blake had used this instability in diachronic and synchronic identity to create an aesthetic if unstable distance in his figural reading of the temporal contradictions made visible by the events of the Revolution; in contrast, Wollstonecraft situates herself as a perceptive albeit concerned observer of the events immediately preceding and following the storming of the Bastille. Writing her response months before Marie Antoinette was guillotined, the witnessing of history in the *View* occurs long before the “dust” of the French Revolution had settled. In fact, throughout the *View* Wollstonecraft remains topical in a way in which Blake decidedly is not: earlier in the text, for example, Wollstonecraft refers directly to captivizing the French aristocrats, and speculates not on events which the future will bring, but, on the contrary, the past

which will be produced by the present social actants *as* the future, thereby relying on the visibility of a future-past. Immediately preceding the passage above is the following:

Weeping--scarcely conscious that I weep, O France! Over the vestiges of thy former oppression. . . I tremble lest I should meet some unfortunate being, fleeing from the despotism of licentious freedom, hearing the snap of the *guillotine* at his heels. (*Political* 342)

Framed by the languages of (novelistic) sentimentality and picturesque discourse morality (the ruins of the past social and moral order), the “past” of Wollstonecraft’s proper political and moral history is yet to be inscribed in and, more importantly for Wollstonecraft, *as* the present “historic page,” as she put the relation of her praxis of writing to historical events in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (*Political* 75).

Thus, throughout the text Wollstonecraft makes direct reference to recent events--events which are, for the writer as for the captives, *in medias res*.

The distinctly social, temporal character of Wollstonecraft’s “writer” position is also clear in another attribute she shares with Blake: an intellectual and emotional response to Milton, who becomes for both a figure of, and contributor to, an oppressive poetic and social history (albeit in a distinctly and somewhat perversely individualized way for Blake). As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, Wollstonecraft’s second *Vindication* often reads like an “outraged commentary on *Paradise Lost*” (*Madwoman* 206). Despite the paucity of his appearances in the text, Milton becomes a figure of immense importance in Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of Rights of Woman*, and an example of the continuity of Wollstonecraft’s two *Vindications* with *Historical and Moral View*,

which signifies that Wollstonecraft understood these texts as inter-generated components of a social project whose contextual political impact is all the more effective in her imbedding of their philosophical-historical consistency. Milton is an essential component of Wollstonecraft's reading of a continuity of past and present, a writer whose faulty if immensely influential "past" logic of the social surfaces in Rousseau's equally ubiquitous if misguided figures of the present. Milton and Rousseau take on parabolic value as indices of the repressive past that must be re-read (which concomitantly institutes the search for a methodology of reading), and as symbolic acts of, and actants in, a repressive history. By re-locating "history" in figures of empirical participation, Wollstonecraft implicitly inscribes a praxis as memory, in the mode of remembering her writing contextualizes within and against the figures of the French Revolution. Thus, in Blake's *Milton*, Milton's text melds with the body of Milton in a mytho-poetic and historic figure who is all but powerless to control the ghosts of other pasts within him; and although Wollstonecraft is not blind to the problem of repetition (the project that subtends all of her texts, in fact, is an attempt to produce the practice of writing as recalling this very memory), in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Milton remains foremost a writer whose cultural and political effects must be brought to a forum of rational debate. In other words, Wollstonecraft foregrounds her particular practices of reading as a form of memory and her style of writing as social *praxis*. In contrast to the logic of *View*, this device of "constructing" the historical is on one level a more effective figure for politicizing a social memory, for melding rhetorical figures and individual agency into social acts. But the

degree of political agency this trope inscribes on the social memory is dependent upon a climate of acceptance. The rhetoric of the *View* works toward creating and ensuring such a climate: Wollstonecraft re-structures her revolutionary project by creating a (social) context, a foundation of receptivity. If the French Revolution inspired terror and awe in equal proportion in the eighteenth-century social mind, Wollstonecraft would work toward creating a climate in which the expressly revolutionary aims of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, based on the initial idealism of the grand social experiment signified by the French Revolution, were divorced from the subsequent horrors in which individuals engaged as means to “idealistic” ends. The philosophy of history Wollstonecraft develops in the *View*, in which she uncovers the same intricate relation of past and present, is analogous with that subtending her “revolution in female manners.” But in the *View* this philosophy is present in a *de-personalized* articulation of the “present-future” *geist* of the social and against the etherealized “past-present” in Burke’s *Reflections*. Between Wollstonecraft’s personalization of the mechanisms by which a repressive history is reproduced (in the figures of Rousseau and Milton) or that personalization eliminated (as in the figures of the French Revolution) is a subtle shift in the balance of causal power and with it, the agency of the “individual” which Sterne had parodied and Blake had fought to re-figure. Thus, Wollstonecraft’s *View* presents the same trope of temporality that forms the foundation of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a hopeful present “disfigured” literally and figuratively by a past; but in *View* Wollstonecraft’s presentation of that trope sublimates an articulation of the means for a direct project of human intervention,

essentially passivizing agency as the product of a social network of oppression that precedes the period of terror, or distancing the express philosophy of equality from “the terrors” by presenting it in the form of a dis-embodied desire for equality. Throughout the *View* are passages like the following:

Let not the happiness of one half of mankind be built on the misery of other, and humanity will take place of charity, and all the ostentatious virtues of an universal aristocracy. How, in fact, can we expect to see men live together like brothers, when we only see master and servant in society? For till men learn mutually to assist without governing each another, little can be done by political associations towards perfecting the condition of mankind (332).

Even here, however, in the egalitarian rhetoric in which Wollstonecraft couches her social vision, gender remains formative, if in a muted way: by and large, it is “men” who must learn. If in the *View* male/female discussion most often becomes a deliberate subtext of causal logistics, gender makes a similarly muted appearance in Wollstonecraft’s projection of the perfected society: liberty soars “with maternal wing” and reason “will give strength to the fluttering wings of passion” (307; 305). In fact what agency does remain in the perpetration of terror is represented as a social construction of the conditions for such acts: as opposed to Burke’s presentation of the same page of history, Wollstonecraft’s depiction of the October 5, 1789 marches specifies the predominating gender of the participants.

Early then on the fifth of October a multitude of women by some impulse were collected together; and hastening to the *hôtel-de-ville* obliged every female they met to accompany them. . . The concourse, at first, consisted mostly of market women, and the lowest refuse of the streets, women who had thrown off the virtues of one sex without having the power to assume more than the vices of the other. . . They took to the road by the *Champs Elisées* about noon, to the number of four thousand, escorted by four or five hundred

men. . . (*Political* 358)

The reader need only refer to *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to infer what utterly social sources produce the “powerlessness” of the marchers, the enervation of their agency in the social body made visible in random acts of terror.

Concurrent with this version of a radically secularized unfolding of temporality, history becomes implicated in the grafting of a physiological, bio-mechanical language to a moral philosophy developed across the eighteenth century by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, Shaftesbury, Locke, Francis Hutcheson, Hume, and Adam Smith, among others. If benevolence is indivisible from human intention, as Shaftesbury had claimed earlier in the century and Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith had inflected in particular ways, existence is inherently moral.¹⁷ And if Locke’s epistemology makes existential sensation the necessary foundation of consciousness, the individuated human body becomes an essential link in the chain of interpretation and observation, right reason and moral

¹⁷ Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity* informs the subsequent development of sentimentality; as J.G.A. Pocock asserts, the work is founded on the “religiosity of the sociable man” (*Virtue* 229). In *Inquiry Concerning Virtue*, Shaftesbury argues for benevolence as an ingrained love for self and others, and in *Characteristics of Men*, Shaftesbury posits an innate conscience. Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* and *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions* both present a natural sympathy that leads humanity to virtue. Though tempered by Hume, who does not align “reason” and natural benevolence, such ideas yet persist in his social philosophy, where in promoting the greater human good, humanity expresses its benevolence and socially-informed sympathy. Finally, Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* posits an ethical structure in the imagination, as through this faculty the individual mind grasps the conditions of others, thereby forming a bond of sympathy or empathy with them.

sentiment. Curiously, without the individual body, no practice of objectivity can make itself felt in and as the social “body.”

Clearly, Locke’s interpretation of the crucial importance of sensation for all thought (and thus, all forms of “objectivity” as well as “subjectivity”) left a tantalizing conceptual contradiction interpreted by many eighteenth-century thinkers as an “obscurity” of the text to be overcome by a supplementary articulation. Hutcheson, Hume and Smith’s differing versions of moral sentimentality were attempts to suture the broken lineaments of a language of objective “observation” with one of subjective “perception” and to identify accompanying social practices which dissolve the dead-Locke of a non-oppositional logic of “detachment” or “disinterestedness.” Locke’s delineation of sensation seemed to collapse any distinction between objectivity and subjectivity, and with it any capability to discern right reason from “base” reason, as well as any ability to re-attach a grandiose past to a fallen present in order to regenerate “the future” as a historical necessity. If the body is inextricable from the site of observation, since “sensation” becomes the ground of the subject’s self-reflective capability (making, in Locke, memory that measure of *relative* “capacity” for understanding), then “objective” observation appears lost. Addison and Steele’s *Spectator* papers detail an aesthetic realm of detached taste for a reading public hungry for the possibility of disinterested, if subjectivized, cognition (papers 409, 413). Pope, Finch, and a host of other writers also attempt to articulate, with differing emphases, a social experience of detachment through revising transcendental “reason” and its application to the practical sphere of rationality, moral

actions or “manners.” Edmund Burke’s *Enquiry* comes dangerously close to further relativizing the aesthetic categories through which a detached viewpoint becomes admissible.¹⁸ And despite Johnson’s promontory “Observation with extensive view,” humanity is condemned “To tread the dreary Paths without a Guide” (“Vanity” 973).

That distancing from the indeterminacies of the world, that “escape”--seemingly assured in the spatial metaphor of the overview--from “the fancied Ills . . . and darling Schemes” indicative of individual and social ruin must be reworked in order to reappear within, rather than from beyond, the body of the world. The “pure time” Samuel Johnson lamented losing in his recurring nostalgia for an irretrievable past (and thus, a present adrift in its irrevocable distance from that past) was yielding to a notion of the “present” in which an aestheticized “pure” time could effect a suturing of Johnson’s bifurcated present precisely through its unfolding as a manifestation of distinctly social energies. This movement asserts itself in a number of discursive matrices, in effecting transpositions of “ideas” and generating intertexts of genre.¹⁹ For example, the discourse of (sentimental)

¹⁸ It is perhaps for this very reason--the anarchic potential Burke glimpsed in his own aesthetic text (*Enquiry*)--that Burke’s tory sentiments come to be so clearly articulated in *Reflections*.

¹⁹ In “On the Use of Contradiction,” John Barrell and Harriet Guest suggest that this mode of perceiving becomes visible earlier in the century as a change in the “nature of the modern world” makes “mixed genres” more commodious strategies of representation, i.e., didactic poetry, the epistle, the satire, all among the more digressive modes of representation, are some of the elements of Pope’s *Epistle to Bathurst* (132-33). Barrell and Guest identify a number of other works of poetry in the middle of the eighteenth century whose formal characteristics exhibit “mixed” modalities, including Thompson’s *The Seasons*, Young’s *Night Thoughts*, and, later, Goldsmith’s *The Deserted Village*.

physiology works to transpose the individual body into the realm of discursivity from which it was hitherto largely excluded by the need to contain “contradictions” inherent in theories of sentimentality;²⁰ certain of the body’s functions could be managed in the

Barrell and Guest’s explicit focus is the aesthetic management, in a staging of “oppositions” at once digressive and controlled, of discursive contradictions. But as my readings of Sterne, Blake, and Wollstonecraft make clear, this strategy of representation is not limited to the formal event of the text, in which the incursions and excursions of different “modes” of representation are organized and controlled at the level of an aesthetic practice. If, as Barrell and Guest persuasively argue, the literary text can be read as an exemplary site of (i.e., a particularly self-reflexive gesture for) staging contradictions in a cultural, political, and social context, the reverse movement is also possible: the contradictions presented in the literary work conceived and executed as the artifact of that cultural contradiction signify elements of the discursive field’s intertextuality that *cannot* be managed in their wider, social applications and signifying potentialities. Such overdeterminations *must* be staged rather than eliminated; thus, the figure of the reader simultaneously becomes a mark of the fragmentation, the “ruin,” of textual/authorial autonomy and a means whereby a second-order unity is posited *as* the social.

²⁰ I consider these less as “contradictions” than as nodes in which sentimentality intersects within a wide range of rhetorical forms. In fact, in its dual roles as an analytical category and an experiential indicator, “sentimentality” or “the sentimental” is notoriously unstable. The central reason for this, I believe, is its multiplicity of forms—an over-determination of its utility rather than an under-determination of its meaning. As Markman Ellis notes, sensibility extended into many fields of knowledge, including: “the history of ideas (moral sense philosophy). . .the history of aesthetics (taste). . .the history of religion (latitudinarians and the rise of philanthropy). . .the history of political economy (civic humanism and *le doux commerce*. . .the history of science (physiology and optics). . .the history of sexuality (conduct books and the rise of the domestic woman). . .the history of popular culture (periodicals and popular writing)” (*Politics of Sensibility* 8). Both dramatically indeterminate and rhetorically ubiquitous, “sentimentality” at once substantiates my claim of a radical form of intertextuality in eighteenth-century discursive structures and precludes my use of the term as an organizational rubric. Its bewildering array of transformations in the eighteenth century also suggests that the Augustan notion of “concepts” tends to differ from our own: concepts or, roughly, “ideas,” tend to be interpreted as tools for shaping rather than categories for determinations. Obviously, I can merely suggest its peculiar motility with one or two sample readings of its transformation of forms.

closely related meaning-complexes that ranged across “sentiment,” “sensibility,” and “delicacy.” In “sentimental” physiology the sentimental body becomes an object of observation and a subject of writing through its paradoxical inscription as a dis-embodied morality made manifest in the subjective sensations of a rigidly delimited corporeality.²¹ As the early “physiologist” Alexander Munro “observed,” a “sympathetic nerve” grounded the laws of physical sensation; in his discourse of physiology, then, even the most venial, the most dis-missive, or the most vulgar of sensory data--including the invisible operations of the physical body--could be anchored in *moral observation*. If the human body is inherently moral, brute materiality--the veniality, vulgarity, coarseness of the physical world--justifies the ways of God to “man” in the most irreducible facts of existence. Similarly, “objective” interpretation becomes validated at the level of basic biology. As Graeme Tytler recognizes, Lavater’s immensely popular *Essays on Physiognomy* (1775-

²¹ For an alternative treatment of this textual mechanism (or alternatively, phenomena) see also Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* 404-07. Gramsci’s discussion of the “work” of style in perpetuating ideological constructions differs from my own representation of the instability of genre classifications as an intertext capable of shifting linguistic and social relations. If, as Theodor Adorno wrote in a letter to Walter Benjamin, all reification is a forgetting, and “style,” for Gramsci, can bridge ideological contradictions (i.e., can do quite efficiently the work of reification), then shifts in “style” do the work of forgetting. But as is clear in my discussion above, such shifts not only conceal but also disclose phenomena of “reification.” Gramsci’s formulation of “style” is primarily a logic of what Paul Ricoeur in his re-reading of Freud calls “a hermeneutic of suspicion.” Grounding the hermeneutic of suspicion is the assumption of an individual or collective will which acts as a causal mechanism *to disguise*, to create the site of a forgetting--precisely the causal agency I argue is suspended in the eighteenth century texts I analyse here. My use of “intertext” places the production of history between individual and social agency, and thus resituates the operation of re-membering the social from Gramsci’s more explicitly Marxist perspective.

78) provided “geometric analyses of skulls and foreheads” as well as presentations on the moral influences on appearance, “family, national, and animal physiognomies” and notes that “the capacity for intelligent and sensitive observation is now [by the 1790s] usually a sign of moral depth and humanity” (“Lavater and Physiognomy” 297; 303).²² It seems banal to insist on the existential logic of this discursive formation: all those who exist have the potential to partake of objectivity since the “body” is the inalienable possession of everyone who can be said to exist. Wollstonecraft recognized that this figure of the body democratizes “the individual” in the same proportion that it democratizes individual perception. The materialist tradition, too, contributes certain ideas about the body in its application as metaphor for the social. Staged famously in a correspondence between Wollstonecraft’s intellectual and social mentor, Dr. Richard Price, and his materialist friend, Joseph Priestly, the materialists contested causality as the property of the “individual” as insistently as Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*. Indicative of the direction this de-individualizing of causality could take in the philosophical tradition of materiality is Priestly’s response to Price’s conceptualization of “soul”:

What Dr. Price says of *the soul* (p. 355) that, ‘it is possessed of faculties which make it an image of the deity, and render it capable of acting by the same rule with him, of participating of his happiness, and of living for ever, and improving forever under his care,’ I can say of *man*. But I do not think that, for this purpose, it is at all necessary that the mind should be *incorporeal, uncompounded, or self-determining*, arrogating to ourselves the attributes of *little independent gods*. To whatever kind of substance, though it should be the humblest *dust of the earth*, that the truly noble prerogatives of man be

²² For a more in-depth discussion of Lavater see John Graham’s *Lavater’s Essays on Physiognomy*; see also Graham’s “Lavater’s *Physiognomy* in England.”

imparted, it will appear to me equally respectable. For it is not the *substance*, but the *properties*, or *powers*, that make it so. (*Free Discussion* 394)

Clearly, Wollstonecraft's mobilization of the metaphor of the body suggests both Price and Priestly's views. In fact, she seems to draw her social body--a half-formed, half-transcendental, half-"substantive" embodiment of proper history--as a mediation of both arguments. If Priestly called into question the attribution of incorporeality to physical matter, he yet claimed that all matter--and by inference, all bodies, female as well as male--was worthy of observation, thereby democratizing "the object" of observation. Thus, "Psychiatric-sentimentalists" such as Robert Whytt could read "non-sensical" aspects of the body made suitable objects of inquiry in their intertextuality: "In some the feelings, perceptions, and passions, are naturally dull, slow, and difficult to be roused; in others, they are very quick and easily excited, on account of a greater delicacy and sensibility of brain and nerves" (*Observations* 538).²³ That this mode of "reading," this attention to shifts in interpretation at the level of language, was possible is clear in a remark made earlier (1749) by David Hartley. Hartley struck a plaintive note when he ridiculed the intercession in his scientific language of the properly aesthetic, reading the latter as an

²³ A number of scholarly works address varying aspects of these shifts in the composition of objects for study and the accompanying creation of entire fields of descriptive language. For considerations of medical/physiological and sentimental intertextuality, see, for example, R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress*; G.S. Rousseau, "Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres"; John A. Dussinger, "The Sensorium in the World of *A Sentimental Journey*"; John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*; Karl Figlio, "Theories of Perception"; T.M. Brown, "From Mechanism to Vitalism in Eighteenth-Century English Physiology."

absurd linguistic performance: “that the Nerves themselves should vibrate like musical Strings, is highly absurd; nor was it ever asserted by Sir *Issac Newton*, or any of those who have embraced his Notion of Performance of Sensation and Motion, by means of *Vibrations*” (*Observations* 11-12).

As Hartley’s metaphor suggests, the effects of these transpositions are by no means limited to emerging scientific discourses: such shifts are also evident as “developments” in aesthetics.²⁴ As we have seen in the discourses of Gilpin and Price, picturesque writing and the practices of “the tour”--that is, in the establishment of sites for the most “detached” observation, as well as the invention of the technical apparatus of the Claude glass and its technologizing of the body’s posture and location--also create, *within* and *as* nature, temporal designations and spatial positions of objective, “detached” observation: the “repetition” of the tour in the visitation of select, exemplary “aesthetic” sites creates a social memory beyond individual recall. In this action, the “repetition” of the tour is a Kierkegaardian “repetition” or Aristotelian *kinesis*:²⁵ it produces as it repeats,

²⁴ In addition, eighteenth-century scholars have explored the relation of aesthetics and politics in sentimentality. See Carol Kay, “Sex, Sympathy, and Authority,” and “Canon, Ideology, and Gender”; John Mullan, *Sentiment*; Robert Markley, “Sentimentality as Performance.” Syndy Conger, ed. *Sensibility in Transformation*. For readings that stress the aesthetic aspects of sensibility rather than physiological/biological “sentimental” discourse, see Stephen D. Cox, “*Stranger Within*” and “Sensibility as Argument”; Northrop Frye, “Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility”; Jean H. Hagstrom, *Sex and Sensibility*; Louis Brevold, *Natural History*.

²⁵ For an interesting reading of Kierkegaard’s “repetition,” see John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, esp. chapters one and two. For my purposes, Aristotle’s definition of *kinesis* appears in the construction of the operations of memory, in which, as I make

adds to the present as it reflects the past. This repeating produces “the social” as a kind of remainder of the logical deduction of individual agency, the element of memory that does not appear as such, “context” as the unthought of individual intentionality. “The social” becomes the storehouse of forgotten productions of images, undisclosed acts of representation. In the absence of a theory of the individualized unconscious, for Wollstonecraft “the social” inserts itself into discursive visibility mid-way between operations of recollection and forgetting, as the reproductions of memory that produce beyond recollection. This is not to claim that the eighteenth century notion of mind “retains” a Freudian unconscious: this memory beyond recall is, as is clear in the picturesque experience, the *act* of “the social” in a democratized inscription of “observation.” There is nothing that can be recalled about this space of inscription within the life-world of the eighteenth century horizon of disclosural possibility since its suturing of the social body appears only as the trace of the sign of a natural determination—it is not what is claimed “natural,” but the unvoiced linguistic-performative syntax in the eighteenth-century “language-game” that marks this claim with the potential for validity.²⁶

clear in the introduction, memory is both an active (re)constitution of sensory data and a passive organ of reflection and “restitution.”

²⁶ Michael McKeon suggests this epistemological conundrum in the “double epistemological charge” carried by the “idea of news”: “the credible claim of objective historicity, and the claim demystified as a ‘romance’ convention in disguise.” This epistemology ranges between “naïve empiricism” and “extreme skepticism” (49-50). But as I have tried to show throughout this work, the epistemological operations of a number of texts across the eighteenth century do not vacillate between McKeon’s polar oppositions; in fact, they challenge this distinction in eighteenth-century signification.

As such, this operation remains beyond the storehouse of images constitutive of the Freudian logic of the unconscious. This is tantamount to saying that its operations can only be “recalled,” with all the resultant distortions introduced by its transposition into another “historical” context, either from a future site of intertextuality, at which such operations appear as unvoiced contradictions--or from a remarkable act of self-reflexivity, in a reading of, a “scripting out” of and from, over- or underdetermined uses of language. The “unconscious,” if it can be said to exist at all in the eighteenth-century discursive realm, is the act of a social replication which no hermeneutic of the social text can properly retrieve. Neither purely social nor wholly individual, but partaking of both, “the social” remains determinately a-conscious. In the eighteenth-century economy of understanding, the pre-objects “acted out” in such spaces can be interpreted neither as *a priori* designations of thought beyond sensation (thereby satisfying Locke’s dictum, “no innate ideas”) nor as constructions of the mind in its combination of simple ideas into complex thoughts or associations (thereby avoiding the pure subjectivity of world creation). Wollstonecraft’s project makes this reading *praxis*--this combination of reading and writing, privative reflexion and social act--visible.

In Wollstonecraft’s own autobiographical contribution to travel literature, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, the more traditional mechanism of “memory,” in which images are objects for consciousness, is emptied;

practices.

representations that cannot find linguistic equivalents break through the text. Passing over the most “uncultivated part” of Sweden (and over the most uncultivated part of recollection), Wollstonecraft concludes that

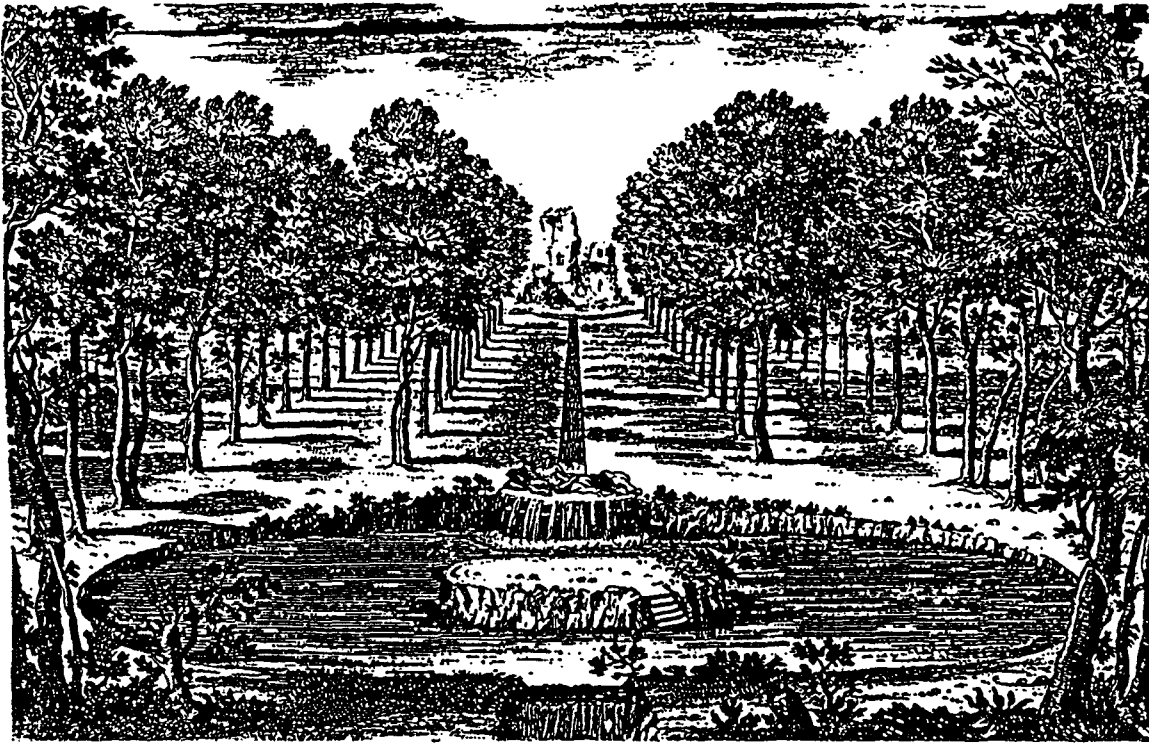
There is an individuality in every prospect, which remains in the memory as forcibly depicted as the particular features that have arrested our attention; yet we cannot find words to discriminate that individuality so as to enable a stranger to say, this is the face, that the view. We may amuse by setting the imagination to work; but we cannot store the memory with a fact. (37-8)

The passage seems a curiosity in Wollstonecraft’s works until we remember that her entire effort as a polemicist is precisely the recovery of such “memory” as past, present, and future. In the variety of ways I have suggested throughout this chapter, Wollstonecraft marks her resistance to traditional memory and to traditional figures of memory’s operations. The most succinct version of her distrust of traditional memory is in her second *Vindication*, in a passage in which she re-inflects Locke’s “association of ideas” for her own purposes:

There is a habitual association of ideas, that grows ‘with our growth,’ which has a great effect on the moral character of mankind; and by which a turn is given to the mind that commonly remains throughout life. . . associations which depend on adventitious circumstances, during that period that the body takes to arrive at maturity, can seldom be disentangled by reason. One idea calls up another, its old associate, and memory, faithful to the first impressions . . . retraces them with mechanical exactness. (*Political* 201)

What Hartley read only as irritants in language use, produced by mixed modalities of understanding (and which he figured as absurd linguistic performances), Wollstonecraft understood as the peculiar motility of intertextual signification: less a metaphysically

destabilizing friction among clashes of different “languages” than a potential to re-read discursive silence as embodied (or more pointedly, engendered) inequity. Read as signifiatory potential, such language could lead to the assertion of an alternative language of social acts, for which her writing supplied both form and content in offering a re-formation of social memory as well as an inscription of the text and of writing as constituting the techné of memory, themselves more fruitful operations of recollection than the structures of traditional memory. Throughout this effort, she recognized that *all* words are social practices: whatever in the discursive realm was marked as transcendental meant, for Wollstonecraft, *occupied by an absence* in the social world. Her textual forging of a social memory repeatedly searches across the many “languages” of her linguistic, political, and cultural contexts to re-direct the social as and into this never articulated language and space that resists known interpretations of “history”; for the spectre of transcendental corporeality is also such a space: it, too, has no name but that which is yet to be articulated by, and as, the social. At the same time, Wollstonecraft steadfastly refused its socialized invisibility.



9. Batty Langley, 'An Avenue in Perspective, terminated with the ruins of an ancient Building after the Roman manner', from *New Principles of Gardening* (1728). British Library, London

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