Riotous Life: The Rhetoric and Politics of Romantic Organisms

By

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For Nick and Marco

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Abstract

Riotous Life reads Romantic and post-Romantic poetry and prose in which life and its destruction become entwined in the figure of the nonhuman. This dissertation takes Paul de Man's notion of the materiality of language, which is a kind of autodestruction of human intention and signification, as the starting point for theorizing forms of life that fall outside of representational or historicist accounts of Romanticism's politics. Materiality is not only a performative force that disrupts language's cognitive function in Romantic texts. It also appears in those texts as the violent force of biological and ecological life upon the anthropomorphic abstractions of capital and empire. I use this dual conception of materiality—both textual and political—to locate a correspondence between nonhuman life and destructive political forms. Using the term "riotous" to index this correspondence, I read Romantic poetry and prose for the mechanical, plant and animal figures that rise against S.T. Coleridge's claim that "the perfect frame of man is the perfect frame of the state."

Coleridge's *Conciones Ad Populum* (1795), John Gareth Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), Percy Shelley's "The Sensitive Plant" (1820), Giacomo Leopardi's "La Ginestra (The Broom Plant)" (1836), and Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) each posit a duality within nonhuman life. The nonhuman was often used as the catch-all impediment to human progress and universal enlightenment. But I argue that when Romantic-era accounts of food riots and slave rebellions, and more generally a Romantic rhetoric of life, reproduction, and need, disfigure the human form, they reveal critical limits to life's

subsumption within the histories of capital and empire. These limits are more than epistemological. They trace the material aporias proposed by surplus populations, anti-colonial rebellions, non-anthropocentric nature, and reproductive needs, from which a politics of life emerged throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that cannot be equated with the broader concept of Revolution. Along with the repressive and regressive uses of it, I argue that the nonhuman continues to provide us with a materialist reading of Romantic and post-Romantic crises and struggles over life.

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Introduction: The Rhetoric of Romantic Life

This dissertation is animated by two related phrases that open out to the intersection of poetry, science, and political economy in the Romantic period. The first comes in a footnote in S.T. Coleridge's 1816, unpublished essay, *Hints Towards the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life*, a work meant to contribute to the vitalist debates and their question of Life's divine or material origins. In that essay, Coleridge embeds a curious footnote within a project aimed at making life into a symbol of transcendence. In an extended footnote, he writes of the corallaghine slime that, "It grows, and still as it grows deposits carbonate of lime, even as gristle becomes bone,--and thus, we may truly say, *lives by dying*" (1029-1030 n1).[1] The second phrase comes from Percy Shelley's 1820 poem, "The Sensitive Plant," where he describes an array of fungi as "forms of living death," a phrase that is at the center of Chapter Two of this dissertation.

Both of these phrases could be read as vaguely Hegelian, as figures of negation that prompt the recurrence of Life's overcoming. In such a version, the death of corallaghine bone would become the home for its new generation. And the mushrooms and molds of Shelley's poem would foster new growth through a life whose sole function is to consume death, to make it reproductive. Such phrases would be apologies for

[1] The full footnote reads: "A slime distinguishable into gelatinous warts, overskins, a stem, or earthly pipe, composed of carbonate of lime; within and out of which stony pipe there arises a gelatinous pipe, by the finest imaginable softenings of the lifeless and stony edges: which gelatinous pipe blossoms into an animal of the syngenesia character; a bud, or wart, if separated and detached from the earthly pipe, forms the commencement of a new coral. It grows, and still as it grows deposits carbonate of lime, even as gristle becomes bone,--and thus, we may truly say, lives by dying. This power of deposing a matter not (in the same form at least) pre-existent, whenever increase is the result of such deposition, we distinguish by the term Productivity."

destruction. They would comfort us through the assurance that Life in general survives discrete instances of death.[2] In this project I have tried to understand these phrases otherwise, as more akin to the Hegelian mode that Butler reads in *Subjects of Desire*. There Life designates a struggle that is continually worked through between the failure of consciousness to subsume material life in understanding.[3] Rather than satisfied on their own terms, those phrases above hint at a more radical negation, a more radical materiality, that infects organic form. Butler describes such negation as a *rhetorical* movement from which Consciousness cannot escape, one in which "the insight that is finally revealed is first enacted without self-awareness," which once revealed moves elsewhere. Such movement "unwittingly enacts [meaning] against those it explicitly intends" (31).

Coleridge and Shelley's phrases seem more appropriately Hegelian in this sense, as fragments of life enacted without, even against, its final subsumption by Consciousness, as fragments that fail to be mere substitutions. These phrases read like slips of the tongue that give away what cannot be immediately deciphered in the relationship between the living and the dying. They take the logic of the lyric, in which

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[2] Throughout this introduction I use that capitalized "Life" to refer to this idea of life in general, or in its "generic sense, distinct from the life of the single, living individual, from *a* life" (Agamben *Use* 200).

[3] Butler notes that in Hegel, such rhetorical movements that bring life into understanding pose an unceasing problem, in that Consciousness is always rendered retroactive and "the 'Life' of the subject is constant consolidation and dissolution" (70). Life is the persistent limit to, and condition of, cognition. Helmut Müller-Sievers reads such limitations in a different way, arguing that it is precisely the lack of understanding that becomes the mark of natural, teleological processes. In autopoeitic and organicist accounts, a transcendental mode of Life is displaced in favor of an immanent form that eludes understanding: "The only form under which the absolute can be said to exist is the organism, since only organically can the interminable chain of causes and effects be bent back onto its own origin, and only as organic can a discourse claim to contain all the reasons for its own form and existence" (4).

"Everything can be substituted for everything else," to its extreme, to a point at which metonymy does not quite approach a metaphor that might knit these signifiers, "life" and "death," together.

Despite thinking at first that I might write a project on Romanticism in a more affirmative mode, about a Romanticism in which a trace of the multitudes persisted in a poetics of life, these phrases took me elsewhere. Instead, this project takes as its inspiration a more ambivalent movement, where the potential for a politics gets smuggled into tropes of life, like those above, that do not perfectly substitute. This dissertation tracks a rhetorical movement in which we can read a residue, however poetically or philosophically, of a life that at once exceeds and is left over by the movement of a lyric, of an economy, of a politics in which everything can be substituted for everything else. While much criticism of Romantic literature takes its most important political development to be difference or Otherness, I focus on Romanticism's tendency towards indistinction as the ground upon which difference would work. I look to what de Man called "[figures] of complementarity and correspondence" that sutured difference together through "a necessary link between the two elements in a binary polarity, between 'inside' and 'outside,'" (*Aesthetic* 40) in order to see where it breaks down and where Romantic writing proposes life in its undoing, at a point of incomprehensible substitution.

I rely on a rhetorical reading in this project because, as Butler suggests, its movement evades binary structures and demonstrates the incredible instability upon which epistemologies can be built. Indeed, as Paul de Man continually claimed in his work, it was not for lack of instability or uncertainty that violent and relentlessly

perpetuating epistemologies are maintained. Rhetorical reading thus helps to emphasize the ambivalence and uncertainty upon which the production of knowledge about Life is affirmed.[4] But I also turn to rhetoric in a deconstructive mode because Romantic writing often treats Life and as a problem of language and knowledge, of signifier and signified, of the translation between external and the internal phenomenon between which Life seemed to play.

Scholars attentive to the Romantic rhetoric of life have often commented upon the capacity of substitution to effect animation, particularly in relation to the commodity form. Barbara Johnson's *Persons and Things* and Jennifer Bajorek's *Counterfeit Capital* both point to ways that commodities' self-animated appearance, and the tendency of their production to render workers into inanimate objects, function like figurative tropes. And David Simpson's *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern* reads the ghostliness of Wordsworth's poetic figures as a correspondence between the commodity form and the alienation of entire populations in Romantic-era England. Such work implies an ironic convergence between the language of the economic and of life, traceable through the continual disappearance of materiality into relations of substitution and abstraction, as well as relations of sociability. They make clear that by the mid-eighteenth century, life and production, reproduction and exchange were bound together in a chiasmic relation, and often captured most accurately in figurative language.

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[4] De Man emphasized that the rhetoric of epistemology was "not a question of ontology, of things as they are, but of authority, of things as they are decreed to be." They were grounded on "Properties" that do "not properly totalize, or, rather, they totalize in a haphazard and unreliable way." (*Aesthetic* 39).

Tropes of speech thus figure the dual fetish of the commodity and of the human that makes history hard to grasp. This tropological relation between life and commodities has been used to help us see that "the real life of human beings […] is the product of a history of production" (Warminski 101), and that human history is only ever the mediation of understanding through modes of production. Throughout this dissertation I try to think life, human and nonhumam, as a history of reproduction that is the product of substitution. This project does not account for Romantic life through the commodity fetish or the emergence of the modern market, or the deconstructive implications upon human life and nonhuman things written into the commodity. Its primary concern is not to read the substitutions through which both humans and things become animated in ghostly or mechanical ways once the commodity emerges as the structuring component of the economy. Instead, it turns to another set of indistinctions mobilized within the idea of Life itself or Life as such (much as I dislike those phrases) and the ways in which this idea always refers elsewhere—outside of pure Life—to account for itself. Here I consider the way that Romantic-era political economy, natural history and the life sciences, and poetry and literature produce an idea of Life as a susceptibility to substitution. We could trace that susceptibility across numerous tendencies in the period (towards the abstract equivalence of commodification and the wage, towards theories that made life equivalent to epistemology, towards the development of populations, toward industrialization and the division of labor, etc). Far from an entirely abstract or metaphysical term, Life perhaps names a whole series of processes tending towards seamless substitution, as if Life could be a lyric form.

I look to disruptions of Life through and by life, in the spheres of reproduction, of philosophies and classifications of the nonhuman, rather than to the catachrestic quality of commodities and their circulation. I am interested in how forms of life, human and nonhuman, social and biological, economic and reproductive, coincided with and exceeded the contradictions made visible in the latter processes. If the catachresis of Marx's dancing table figures the secret of the commodity, then can "forms of living death" disfigure a similar secret of life? If commodities' uncanniness hints that their circulation does not produce surplus, then can Coleridge and Shelley's nonhuman forms, themselves uncannily animated, say something about substitution's inability to produce living things? And can acts of sabotage and riot, utopian schemes and the persistence non-capitalist means for meeting needs, be thought alongside such rhetorical disfigurations of substitution? [5] This dissertation looks to the potential intersection of rhetorical disfiguration and political disruptions that occur in the sphere of Life to consider those questions. It looks to the waves of riots and contestations over the abstraction of material needs in the eighteenth century and mechanized humans; to struggles against colonization and vegetal humans; to physiological conditions in which living motions exceed an equilibrium with cognitive motions; to poetry and rhetoric in which life only seems to persist through the limits of substitution. Across such disruptions and incommensurability, political and textual, I trace a materiality of life that shows the substitution of everything for everything to be a deathly operation. I conceive

[5] Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre's *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* is an excellent source on the various modes within Romanticism of resisting capital's reorganization of life and labor.

of such materiality as what remains after substitutions, in instances that, like Adorno's gloss on beauty, might appear to wish for the death of Life in order to live otherwise.

I am interested in the ways that life functions in Romantic and post-Romantic writing as a trope that is *at once* substitutive and reproductive, a transgression that can be read in Romantic-era biology and up to contemporary Marxist treatments of life. Such a troping of life, not through the commodity but through reproduction, might be drawn from the sense of that term that Tilottama Rajan recovers from Hegel. Prior to its stabilization in the later nineteenth century, Rajan writes that in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* reproduction was both "a synonym for generation" and "the system of digestion [and] a metaprocess underlying all animality" (217). Life as reproduction is at once the productive and the repetitive, the vital and the instinctual. While Hegel would work to subsume the latter into the former, I am interested in maintaining that reference to the redundant in what is living, inasmuch as it refers us to something in life that does not always become something else, or that does not substitute for the sake of something else, or that does not "[take] in what is different, yet [continue] the same" (212).[6] My interest in maintaining this animal, nonhuman redundancy in a Romantic rhetoric of life through this project has to do with its capacity to disrupt or suspend life's translation into an abstract equivalence through which life becomes Life.[7]

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[6] Hegel likely draws this sense of reproduction from Aristotle's own, for whom "The most natural work of the living…is the production of another like itself, an animal producing an animal, a plant a plant, in order that, to the extent possible, it may partake in the eternal and the divine" (qtd. in Agamben *Use* 204).

[7] One can almost hear an echo of this redundancy in the tautological structure that Derrida gives to a life that is not mere life, life in general, but that "is life beyond life, life against life, but always in life and for life" ("Force" 289).

In the translation of material processes into a reproductive and generative substitution, something uncannily persists in what is repetitive, involuntary, and hidden in certain instances of Romantic writing of life. And as with Freud's notion of the uncanny, what is in question here, as with the Shelley and Coleridge's phrases above, is not really what is or is not living or inanimate, but how that indistinction evokes what does not substitute or repeat in a naturalized, unremarked way. In this project, such phrases index the coming apart of the abstraction under which substitution ensues. Here I turn to an excessive substitution that occurs between the human and nonhuman, between life and death, in a Romantic rhetoric of life as it disrupts a substitution the secures "the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine, or the economy" (Smith 122) of Life in general.

In contrast to the smooth systems of substitution mobilized throughout the Romantic period—across theories of life and expansions of capital—I look to bodies and movements that fell outside of its signifying chain and disfigured its autopoietic functioning. As we know, by the late eighteenth century the conditions under which life was theorized *and* reproduced were evermore aggressively abstract, reified, and universalizing. Whether we look to the corn market, which had become commodified and speculative since the early eighteenth century, or to the taxonomic, which by the mid-eighteenth century was populated by specimens acquired in the process of capital's global accumulation, Life starts to look like a name tenuously drawing together a dizzying nexus of substitutions.

Here I track instances in which substitution and life seem to come apart and in which that disfiguration might offer a more radical way to think about the disruption of

substitution as a form of life, rather than as something that happens to upset the production of life. Throughout this dissertation I use the terms of disfiguration, disruption, and even destruction to think about forms of life that are not identified with, or do not go entirely into, substitution, but remain living.

I. Romantic Rhetoric and Biopolitics

Shelley and Coleridge's troping above of the limit point between life and death refers us to an obsession of Romanticism. In his 1793 *An Essay Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality*, John Thelwall writes this limit as the as-yet undefined principle of difference "between the pale insensate corpse, and a living being" (5), a difference he declared to be at once obvious and, mysteriously, unknown. For Romantics, this absence of definition produced an uncertainty of what truly made the difference between these opposite states. This paradox is all the more intriguing in the rhetorical formulation used by Thelwall, which sounds like the language Marx would later use to describe the commodity form, as a difference that is at once obvious and unknown.[8] Thelwall's Life, like Marx's commodity, was somehow concrete and abstract. Like the commodity, Life was visible everywhere but shrouded in secrecy. And, like the infamous coat, this self-

[8] Thelwall is not as pithy as Marx, but his full paradox is given as follows: "Life is a *term* so constantly recurring, and, indeed, as one would at first suppose, an *image* so perpetually presenting itself to our senses—and the difference is so striking between the pale, insensate corpse, and a living being, with all the expressions, actions, and attributes with which, in the higher scale of animals, he generally offers himself to our eyes, or our imaginations, that a vulgar observer would sneer at the philosopher who should suggest the difficulty of ascertaining in what vitality consists: yet where is the student, who, upon serious examination, has found himself satisfied with anything that has been said upon the subject?" (6).

evident but mystified thing proved a limitless source of theories, specimens, objects, and systems to render the mechanism behind its value comprehensible.[9]

In short, Life was a metonymic problem, ascertained through parts that substituted for a whole, or even allegorically, where a gap existed between physical signs of vitality and the principle of Life. What was wanted instead was Life as metaphor, or through reference to what Life is or, in Lacan's phrasing, to "the word that is 'the word' *par excellance*" (150). Between the corpse and the living thing, life was, unsatisfyingly, an indistinct thing, a series of substitutions, a chain of signifiers never satisfied: "Life is a term so constantly recurring," as Thelwall put it.[10] Life needed to provide the absolute determination, "the ultimate test by which the *presence of life* may be ascertained," but was only ever apprehended through a repetition that defined life through the intervals of extremes: "for though there are certain signs (as putrefaction, &c.) by which the death of the animal may be demonstrated; yet as it is not even pretended that […] the body which is not putrid is necessarily alive" (7). Indistinction contaminated the problem of Life, which could not account for its own production through the proliferation of substitutions through which it appeared. This structure of repetition and recurrence meant that there was always something uncanny about the accounting of Life, which referred both to what

[9] The fragmentation between general principles and specific cases over which Romantic thinkers struggled in defining Life was, in part, inherited from the breakdown of mechanism in the early eighteenth century. As Stephen Gaukroger writes, this was a breakdown in foundationalist accounts in science that, when confronted with "the increasingly profound problems it faced in dealing with living things" and the regularity with which rational mechanics as "the basic form of all physical processes and interactions," failed to explain their physical processes (332).

[10] Thelwall's phrasing of recurrence suggests that the problem of Life was not only one of abstraction, but of automation too. As Celeste Langan recently reminds us in a reading of Coleridge, Romantic thinking can be tracked not simply as a problem of subsumption or idealism but also as a problem of the automation and "mechanical association" of language ("Pathologies" 120).

was most familiar and most unfamiliar, to what was most remarkable and most hidden. While such uncanniness draws life and the commodity form together again, I want to leave that resonance to the side to expand on the productive effects of treating life through its own structure of unresolved substitution.

Erasmus Darwin implies a different kind of uncanniness in Life, not through the intervals of indistinction that might occur between the living and dead states, but by making analogy between the motions of animation and the motions of thought. Erasmus Darwin, physiologist, poet, and industrial investor, provides a useful allegory of this contamination between thought and life in his 1794 treatise on physiology and taxonomy of disease, *Zoonomia*, which utilizes a kind of metonymy to explain the way that life is like thought. In a subsection of "The Four Faculties or Motions of the Sensorium" entitled "Irritative Motions," Darwin offers the mind's tendency to gloss over letters in favor of fascination with industry as an example of the *materiality* of thought:

> the tone, note, and articulation of every individual word forms a correspondent irritative idea on the organ of hearing; but we only attend to the associative ideas […] thus when we read the words "PRINTING PRESS" we do not attend to shape, size, or existence of the letters which compose these words, though each of them excites a correspondent irritative motion of our organ of vision, but they introduce by association our idea of the most useful of modern inventions (41)

A part for the whole logic makes thought work in Darwin, but it is also implicitly the process by which Life is apprehended too, as Thelwall suggested. Darwin's description is equally physiological and rhetorical, making associative motion into a site of reading. Such reading, and by extension association, occurs metonymically or through the substitution of parts, the word, for a whole, "modern inventions." Thoughts' tendency—as associative motion—is to subsume non-signifying and component parts of writing in an automatic movement towards a larger, composite idea under which not only the letters of printing press, but also the *object* itself, is encompassed. Here life designates a motion made legible through the abstract notion of progress, or "the most useful of modern inventions," which is, at least in this example, a metonymic motion. The idea of "modern invention" is both cause and effect of Darwin's own project, rendered as the effect of associative motion but also the impetus of his own classificatory system.[11]

If for Thelwall Life resembles the obvious secret of the commodity form, then here Darwin shows it to be a kind of real abstraction. The materiality of motion and words are absorbed into the production of abstract ideas, ideas—like Life—that substitute as the very mechanism or logic of accounting in the first place. The "meaning" of motion absorbs and displaces the materiality by which it was generated, turning cause into effect and vice-versa, and blurring a purely classificatory mode with a self-referentializing

[11] Indeed, the *Zoonomia* attempted to "codify 'all human actions in an elaborate system of Classes, Orders, Genera and Species, after the fashion of Linnaeus in botany, and he obviously hoped that this *magnum opus*, by bringing order in a chaos of empirical and barbaric practices, would establish him as the Linnaeus of medicine'" (Preface). In this sense it was engaged not just in a project of knowledge production, but in the aspiration to contribute to what Londa Schiebinger describes as an "'applied botany" that was "big science and big business, an essential part of the projection of material might into the resource-rich East and West Indies" (5). While Darwin may not have aspired as directly as did Linnaeus to contribute to that project, we cannot read his project outside of the mediation of progress through industry and colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

structure that Gaukroger calls natural philosophy's "ability *to act as* a cognitive model" (my emphasis 453).

This rhetorical structure was not particular to physiological or biological notions of Life. Indeed, this confusion between substitution and abstraction also intersects with classical political economy. This indistinction is also operative in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations,* where Smith "historicizes" the economic success of certain Western nations as it emerged from the practice of exchange. Here too substitution gives rise to "modern invention." Where in Darwin the mechanism for such a leap is the associative motion that substitutes letters for ideas, for Smith it is the "propensity" of substitution in human nature that invents. Such propensity functions like Darwin' motion, as a substitution of part for a whole in which propensity becomes a totalizing principle. Substitution, or exchange, metastasizes into the idea of modernity.

The exchange of one thing for another begets the modern invention of the division of labor (which Smith fails to mention is also a fundamental transformation in the nature of exchange too). Smith locates the division of labor as a product of the tendential nature of substitution, to do what Darwin also suggests comes naturally, which is to make substitution into more than itself:

> This division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual consequence, of a *certain propensity in human nature* […] the *propensity to truck, barter, and exchange* one thing for another (168)

Smith essentially defines reproduction as a process of exchange, where substitution serves as the originating principle of productively organized labor. While only a tendency or orientation, exchange—the substitution of one thing for another—becomes the constitutive feature upon which life depends. In this sense, substitution reproduces life, implied in Smith's statement that "Every man lives by exchanging" (172).

What I want to underline here is that Darwin's metonymy and Smith's exchange are no simple arithmetic procedures. They make substitution more than a one-to-one exchange, producing a tendency that becomes totalizing. Thus, exchange is not only the act of bartering, it also spawns the division of labor; and association enables not only a discrete instance of reading, but a motion that enables modern invention. Life in these examples becomes economic, not in the strict sense of commodity exchange and production but rather as a name for a natural, even organic, dynamic of a supplementary substitution. Life is an innate movement of association and exchange that exceeds or transgresses it. These two examples, neither of which explicitly engage the question of Life in as direct a way as Thelwall does, nonetheless repeat the structuring logic of that concept as one that stabilized substitution through a partial totality, or a part that emblematized a whole. Life was not a divisible part of a larger, strictly mechanical operation. Rather, it signified an indivisible or innate tendency, a general principle that named a part as a whole, a name that gathered the metonymy of endless substitutions into a productive metaphor. This logic, as Catherine Gallagher describes it, was shared

between Romantic political economists, of which she counts Smith, and poets as "a vital autotelic system" (33).[12]

The political implications of such a logic become clearer when we recall that it corresponds to the historical backdrop of the biopolitical.[13] For Foucault, the biopolitical logic of the nation-state was premised on capacity and potentiality, which was articulated metonymically. One part, the Third Estate, declared itself to be the partial totality of the nation, the class that organized and ensured the nation's potentiality. It was the part that substituted for the whole, precisely because it could be more than itself, or more than the parts themselves. It could substitute for in a productive way. This biopolitics rhetoric weaves life and economics together in an elastic and dynamic totality, one that was mobilized not through absolute difference but through an indistinction that rendered life substitutable as a population but metonymic as a State. While Foucault refers to the claims of the bourgeoisie to be the nation-state, Catherine Gallagher notes a similar claim made by Romantic writers who hinged the potentiality of the nation-state on the metonym of the "lives of the poor" (12). For both Romantic poets and political

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[12] Gallagher calls Smith's economics a "vitalist physiology" because it calculated profits strictly as based on the reproductive needs, or for capitalists the reproductive costs, of workers. Ricardo would go on to further clarify this point as a temporal quantity rather than as reproductive costs. Ricardo thus "further literalized the older metaphors of the economy as an animated being" in which "human vitality pulses through every exchange" as a constitutive aspect of political economy (23). Thus, while Smith does not address biological life in the same language as does Darwin, his economic theories were also physiological ones inasmuch as they rooted the "modern invention" of concern to him, the division of labor and value production, in the biological need of a certain class of individuals.

[13] Scholars of Romanticism have been particularly invested in elaborating Foucault's notion of biopolitics through its historical context and philosophical resonance with Romanticism. See in particular: *Romanticism and Biopolitics: A Romantic Circles Praxis Volume*, Ed. Alastair Hunt and Matthias Rudolf; *Experimental Life: Vitalism in Romantic Science and Literature,* Rob Mitchell; *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism* Sara Guyer; *Beasts of Burden: Biopolitics, Labor, and Animal Life in British Romanticism;* and *British State Romanticism: Authorship, Agency, and Bureaucratic Nationalism*, Anne Frey.

economists, it was working-class bodies and "natural man" that functioned as the "forces propelling [the commonweal's] movements, and as sources of its equilibrium" (13). If, for Foucault, Sieyes took the bourgeois as the partial totality of the nation, then Romantic writers often took the reproductive bodies of laborers. Romantic rhetorics of life and this biopolitical logic intersect in the economizing that metonymy provides and that "aims," in Foucault's words, "to establish a homeostasis […] by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole" (249).[14]

What I am trying to get at here is not some kind of conspiratorial or agreed upon securitization conjured through the concept of Life, but rather the way in which a logic of substitution was generated across discourses in the Romantic period. What Foucault calls homeostasis, and Gallagher calls equilibrium, secured a stable or regulatory ground through a metonymy that gave Life to us as a partialized totality.

Of course, the kind of capture or enclosure of life through abstraction and calculation, and its related implication of an ontology of manageability, has sometimes put biopolitics in an adverse relation to thinking the political side of political economy. Foucault's claim that "power […] succeeded in covering the whole surface that lies between the organic and the biological, between body and population" (253), along with Agamben's displacement of a biopolitical sovereignty as far back as Imperial Rome, has

[14] I do not want to claim that writing about Life in the Romantic period always shared the same "aims" of Foucault's partializing and immunizing logic of homeostasis and security—although there is much to say about eighteenth century physiology and its immanent approach to disease.[14] participated in the production of the apparatuses Foucault associates with the emergence of the biopolitical. I am aware that I am asking Darwin and Smith's passages above to bear too much, but it is in the hopes that what follows in this project will bear out my attempt to think Life in a particularly economic way.

not always made it a popular political theory. Its focus on apparatuses of management and treatment of bodies as objects of discourse and epistemology has been taken to be fundamentally odds with other accounts of domination and exploitation.[15]

Similarly, the biopolitical has been challenged on the side of the poetic. Sara Guyer argues that it is in the latter than we find a life that exceeds "the management of species and populations" (*Reading* 4). For Guyer, Romanticism's historical location within the emergence of the biopolitical generates more than history can tell. Poetry, and specifically John Clare's poetry, attends to the life produced by managerial and discursive apparatuses, but is not reducible life to them. Clare's poetry teaches us that Life can neither be pure—in the sense of life as such—nor entirely objectified—in the sense of life as thing. Life is peculiarly tropological in the way that it is only ever accounted for, at least in certain Romantic writers, through incommensurable references. The indistinction in which life survives those two operations could be called a biopoetics, in her words, the name for a recognition that "life […] is a matter of politics, that it is a matter of power and contestation over viability—over the meaning and the right to life" (17). It is because the Romantic concept of life is rhetorical that it can be political. The politics of life thus takes the form of a kind of dissociation, both historically, "from the violent nationalisms and redemptive environmentalisms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (4-5), and at a more constitutive level where it can only ever name a

[15] In the Romantic period alone, for instance, one must consider the management and micro-politics of the biopolitical alongside the extreme material violence of what Marx called "so-called primitive accumulation" and that encompasses enclosure, the division and gendering of labor, slavery, colonialism, and extraction, and the formal hegemony of wage labor. These accounts do not always converge easily. Further, critics of the concept of biopolitics, especially its more linguistically-minded interpreters, often dismiss its inability to account for real surplus or excess, both in relation to value production or revolutionary action.

dislocation. Such rhetorically-inspired readings of Romantic life wrest, in quite unconventional ways, a conceptual of life back from the divisions and distinctions through which historicism understands it in favor of a more promissory structure.

The political implications of such biopolitical readings have to do with the general politics of rhetorical readings, with the impossibility of closure, of complete subsumption or identification between language and life.[16] They insist on a fundamental undecideability of life, in the sense of an impossible knowing in advance of what might come, might have come, in life. Thus, even as biopolitics emerged to graph and cover everything "between body and population," even as the study of human life emerged in conjunction with the commodification of human life, even as physical motion became increasingly assimilated into "modern invention," a Romantic rhetoric of life asks us to remain committed to finding life as it fails to coincide with such processes. Poetry's persistent incommensurability and indistinction with the historical thus helps us to think a life against the abstraction of life in Romanticism, a responsibility for life that Derrida once described as without limit.

This project is deeply indebted to such modes of reading. At the same time, it tries to find the point at which such reading helps us to consider contestations over life in the Romantic period. Thus it moves between the two—the rhetorical and the historical— to locate limits at which life can no longer be figured, at least not in any easily comprehensible way, through substitution and exchange. Rhetorical reading is particularly useful for this project to the extent that it can help us to think the figuration

[16] I should also say that that rhetorical readings of Romanticism, and Romantic life, also remain attentive to the ways that, as Rebecca Comay recently put it, that "what we mean by *un-closedness* and *to-come-ness* […] are both ultimately about security and closure, not about openness at all" ("Crossings" 9).

of life as substitution in a manner that is identified completely neither with the economic or the biopolitical, and thus in a manner that is neither determinate or given. It can also push us to consider, then, to return to history with an eye towards those struggles and contestation over life as it was pushed to the limit point of substitution, to a limit at which Shelley and Coleridge's phrases above are perched.

II. Life Economic

Natural history, physiology, and what could be called the life sciences of the Romantic era are riddled with threshold figures and partialities that exceed classification. Indeed, a general condition of indistinction left the men of science with "No criterion of distinction betwixt plants and animals" (White 4). While much has been made of the epistemological anxiety that such betwixtment caused, its uncertainty was immensely productive for classifying systems. It led to the proliferation of accounts of life each with their own method of making distinctions *in thought* where they did not exist *in nature*. Systems of ordering and classification often began by attesting to the arbitrary and anthropocentric conditions of their production. In contrast to what we might expect from a period oftentimes associated with the construction of binaries, these writings confirm a commonality across living things and even frequently deny reason as singular to man. Thus, John Rees' 1805 overview of eighteenth-century medicine can wholeheartedly affirm Darwin's refutation of "the ridiculous idea, that of all the animated creation, man alone possessed the power of reasoning" (64). What was most often in question in such systems was not any absolute or ontological distinction, but the best mechanism of

comparison and ordering that could be established for the purposes of understanding living bodies for specific ends.

For instance, Darwin makes clear in *Zoonomia* that all of life, which is animated rather than mechanical, is organized and generated through motion: "the laws of motion are the laws of nature." He divides these motions in an Aristotelian fashion, between primary and secondary, or between cause and effects. (According to him, we only have access to primary motions or causes through effects, and thus in a retroactive, mediated fashion.) Darwin thus divides the entire "sensorium" into distinctive motions and their organization. While modifying his terms, Darwin stays close to John Brown's foundational claim that excitability is the capacity for animation: "That property in the animal system, which renders it alive to the impressions of stimuli, or by which actions are produced, when certain agents are applied, Brown calls the *excitability*; the agents he calls *exciting powers* or *stimuli*; and the actions produced he calls *excitement*" (Rees 15). From this basic principle, which was taken up and modified in different ways by Darwin, William Cullen, William Lawrence, John Thelwall, and others, a world of comparative systems that articulated scales of perfection, autonomy, measurements, self-organization, or some combination of these terms, emerged.

Exhibiting the quality of thinking that Rees described in his dissertation as "a beautiful and spreading willow, which bends unhurt before the storm" (66), Darwin argues that, "The individuals of the vegetable world may be considered as inferior or less perfect animals; a tree is a congeries of many living buds, and in this respect resembles the branches of coralline, which are congeries of a multitude of animals" (cite). Comparing vegetable and animal species, Darwin integrates and intimates the two within

a shared and scaled world of ascending but resembling branches, which also structures the writing of *Zoonomia*. Enmeshing the ranks of taxonomy with the branches of trees, Darwin absorbs the classical verticality of classification into a relationality of resemblance. Distinctions within such an economy have to more to do with degrees of inclusion rather than exclusion. They depend more upon establishing relations than narrow calculations. Through such a life, gradations of difference expanded liberally, which could provide definition through variety and variation of an immanent model rather than categorical differences.

What is most interesting to me about this series of propositions, whether they go by the name of motion, excitability, or what Thelwall called susceptibility, is the extent to which they define Life as an inclusive principle, or a principle of indistinction. These systems generated expansive and liberal systems that included more than they excluded. The proliferation of threshold species, hinged somewhere between plant and animal, animal and human, and even for some mineral and plant—to say nothing of ways that mechanisms of life were only ascertained through dead specimens—disseminated Life as a general capacity from within which distinctions were to be made. This was not only or primarily because of the latent secular theology that permeated theories of Life, even in the theorists who were trenchant materialists, but also because it was articulated through "*governing statements* […] that reveal the most general possibilities of characterization, and thus open up a whole domain of concepts to be constructed" (147). Far from being its primary obstacle, a logic of indistinction and generality was the condition of possibility for a Romantic thinking of Life.

Without wanting to equate Darwin, Thelwall, and other materialists with those

Romantic-era thinkers who maintained a dualism between Life and living thing, I do want to underline the extent to which idea of Life as a principle of indistinction was shared across materialist and vitalist camps.[17] Indeed, I want to suggest that a "regularity of discursive practice" shared by them, even extending to the science of political economy.

Thus, Charles White's *An Account of the Regular Gradations in Man*, an infamously racializing and Eurocentric text that certainly established ultimate distinctions between European men and others, could express the sentiment that while "Nature exhibits to our view an immense chain of beings, endued with various degrees of intelligence and active powers, suited to their stations in the general system […] it is oftentimes difficult, and sometimes impossible, to draw lines of distinction" (1).[18] White's treatise repeats this point incessantly, arguing that commonality is so great across plants, animals, and man that distinctions can only be made for the purposes of enlarging science and knowledge—not because they exist in nature. Comparison wrested difference from the generality of "a principle of life animates all parts and [that] all animals appear to have […] in common" (Youngquist 10). Thus, while Life might be irreducible, bodies were classifiable. The production of difference was often clearly acknowledged to be an

[17] Certainly, Darwin's materialist position on animation and reason would be closer to the position that Agamben finds in Plotinus, for whom there is "a profound unity in life" in which "life is not an undifferentiated substrate to which determined qualities would come to be added, but as an indivisible whole" (*Use* 218).

[18] Here White participates in a racialization of the kind that Daniel Nemser describes as "not a starting point but an end product" that emerges through conjoined disciplinary and infrastructural (or material) processes. The point for Nemser of defining racialization as an end product is to emphasize the extent to which it has to be materially constructed in order to appear epistemologically innate, or "built before it could be forgotten" (4). In other words, in order for it to be thought, and then unthinking or automatically assumed, racialization had to be instituted in "concrete forms" of the kind that emerge in White's treatise through the many instruments and measurements through which he fixes distinction out of distinction.

epistemological project that operated through performative, rather than ontological, distinctions. It was thus articulated through the fragile, but powerful, lines of a performative norm that "both produces and excludes, produces by excluding" (xxvii). In general, then, what we can gather from this overview is that there was a widespread tendency to treat life not just as a general principle, but also as a principle that drew discrete forms into an originary indistinction. Within such definitions, threshold species and forms that defied binary classification can be seen more as rule than as exception.

Again, this is not to suggest that there were not important differences between materialists and dualists. But it is to clarify that a theory of commonality across living bodies, which was left to be divided in any number of ways, was shared across a discursive field. In other words, this field was organized through a foundational principle of mere life, or "life *for itself*, natural life, the simple fact of living" (Derrida "Force" 288). Life itself was the thing upon which calculations, classifications and comparisons did their work. Whether predicated upon motion, gradation or susceptibility, the general epistemology of the Romantic life sciences and natural history began from a position of relationality and indistinction from within which hierarchy and divisions were produced for the sake of "some knowledge of general principles" (Hunter qtd. in Youngquist 63).

Of course, the terms by which distinctions were made diverged significantly. For instance, White posited, and disavowed, the arbitrary point of difference by which he set "European man as the standard of comparison […] to form a pretty regular gradation" such that he could be located "at the head, as being furthest removed from the brute creation" (42). That is, in organizing differences and bodies for the sole purpose of extending European knowledge, his system could affirm the superiority of European man

as arbitrary even while asserting that European man was inferior to other men on certain counts. And as Youngquist notes, John Hunter's comparative anatomy, oftentimes read as ambivalent within the vitalist versus materialist debates of the early nineteenth century—so much so that Coleridge's *Theory of Life* was written to definitively confirm its vitalism—made distinctions through measured comparison of the corpses, bones, and specimens he acquired throughout his career. Darwin, as we have seen, tended to make distinctions through the quality of motions that were operative within a species or class. He ultimately fell back on an Aristotelian system of active and passive matter or active and inert motions. Thus, in the final section of Volume I, Darwin adopts an explicitly Aristotelian structure, concluding that, "causes may be conveniently divided into two kinds, efficient and inert causes, according with the two kinds of entity supposed to exist in the world, which may be termed matter and spirit," or "efficient causes of motion" and "inert causes of motion." [19]

Thus, perhaps counter to many arguments about taxonomy and scientific order in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, these systems of distinction must be understood as originating from the presumption of indistinction and the vast opening this made in which to devise supplemental and artificial orders within it. Such distinctions made the work of science. Distinctions created and legitimated the need for science, not because they existed and could be discovered but because they were artificial and needed to be produced. For Youngquist, the necessity of such systems and their economy of relations

[19] In order to gain some sense of how this distinction formulates an implicit hierarchy of beings, we could look to Darwin's more explicit discussion of male and female roles in generation, where the former is designated the living filament and the other the nutritive function, or to his ultimate conclusion of human reason as a final cause.

and distinctions had to do with a social project of normativity, which always had to establish a monstrous and abnormal body by which to know itself, as "The norm of the proper body […] constitutes monstrosities through exclusion" (61).

What I am more interested in is the extent to which a logic of indistinction, and the capacious relationality it forged between the human and the nonhuman, between what Foucault calls the original and the regular, made Life into an uncanny sphere of substitution. That is, I am interested in how the thinking of Life hinted at something extra within substitution, at once to an unlimited exchange of things that could be organized within its fold and at the same time to a stubborn repetition that could not be made into more than what it was. The indistinctions mobilized within life turn uncanny at this point, implying something both excessive and repetitive, obvious and hidden. The myriad substitutions mobilized in the name of Life were never entirely on the surface. Rather, they disclosed a displacement that rendered the term as insufficient as it was totalizing.

Adam Smith's psycho-physiological description of industry in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* puts this productive confusion between substitution, or a part to part relation, and the economic whole it infers, into a different context. Smith's understanding of the psychology behind industry was really a kind of theory of fascination, in which a continuous motion superseded discrete objects, parts, or functions. In the section "Of the Effect of Utility upon the Sentiment of Approbation," Smith argues for an innate love for what appears as automatic or self-perpetuating motion, over and beyond any appreciation for the utility of a mechanical operation (i.e. a love for modern invention that disregards the printing press). In essence, what he describes is a kind of surplus affect that overcomes mechanical effect: "We naturally confound [real satisfaction] in our

imagination with the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine, or the economy by means of which it is produced" (122). For Smith, man is compelled neither by the utility of machines nor by the discrete parts that make it useful, but rather by the way in which one motion and operation segues, even disappears into, the next in a seemingly automatic series of substitutions. Smith's own substitution of living and exchange above ("man lives by exchanging") could be read as the product of his own diagnosis of fascination here, in which living is the [surplus affect] of the movement of exchange, where the economy is "the means by which [living] is produced." For Smith, the motivation behind exchange is not survival or sustenance, a kind of one-to-one operation. The metaphorical mode of exchange at question in *Theory* is more than a simple process of substitution that might render certain lives as less perfect parts in the "harmonious movement of the system." From the perspective of surplus fascination, offered both in *Theory* and in *Wealth of Nations*, a relative surplus is produced, by which both wealthy and the poor can be counted as equals.[20] Substitution of one thing for another is a drive that exceeds any discrete relation or desire. It is not a primarily mechanical or industrializing process. Rather, it is the irrational and unconscious pleasure of seeing parts work within a total system, of watching the metonymic substitution of part for whole, as the mechanism is absorbed by motion.

Smith's aestheticized sense of motion in *Theory* vaguely repeats Darwin's PRINTING PRESS and the totality of its associative motion. Here the propensity for

[20] Smith writes that the rich "consume little more than the poor, in spite of their own natural selfishness and rapacity […] They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions amongst all its inhabitants" (123). He repeats this sentiment in *Wealth of Nations*, where the immensely complex division of labor behind the production of basic necessities elevates the poorest of living conditions to an equal status as those of the rich.

exchange becomes psychological, and a flawless movement between different parts democratically unites master and spectator:

> That the fitness of any system or machine to produce the end for which it was intended, bestows a certain propriety and beauty upon the whole, and renders the thought and contemplation of it agreeable, is so very obvious that nobody has overlooked it […] Every time [the master] looks at [the object] he is put in mind of this pleasure, and the object in this manner becomes a source of perpetual satisfaction and enjoyment. The spectator enters by sympathy into the sentiments of the master, and necessarily views the object under the same agreeable aspect (118)

This power of substitution, which mistook effects for cause and movement for utility, is foundational. For Smith, man was motivated to labor and industry according by it, not for conscious or voluntary reasons. Rather, "man lives by exchanging" because of his irrational love for "regular and harmonious movement." He *lives* for a fetish of motion, not the utility of the machine to provide sustenance. The surplus produced by living, exchanging men is the effect of a fascination with substitution, not the object-orientation of exchange or even the material drive of need (which Smith largely considers to have been ameliorated in the Western, civilized world).

Smith's economy of spectators, like Darwin's allegory of reading, is a process of substitution, an uninterrupted motion between inside and outside, a "necessary link" between materiality and thought. Distinction of parts and difference between the status of

spectators is neutralized through what de Man called the "commanding metaphor" of "interiorization, […] the external manifestation of an ideal content which is itself an interiorized experience" (de Man *Aesthetic* 100). The operation in which practical ends are overtaken by the motion of their occurrence, where the utility of a machine is overcome by the effect of its overall functioning, enables "numberless combinations, transformations, negations, and expansions" that confused internal processes and economic machinations. Fascination with fitness brings master and "spectator" together in common satisfaction with an economic process that translates interior experience, and man's fundamental indistinction, into the greatest of modern inventions.[21]

Although Smith was writing in the seat of advancing industrialization, his description could not better stage the colonists' gaze on nature, where I want to conclude this overview of substituting life. After all, it is a kind of pleasure in nature's fitness at ending and creating life in general, or mere life, that is so striking in much of natural

[21] This principle of metonymic motion that places the part in the position of the whole brings Smith into the fold of thinkers of indistinction, articulated clearly in his *Wealth of Nations*. In a logic shared with physiology, Smith defines distinction as the artificial product of the perfect machine of the division of labor. Differentiation is effect and not cause of man: "The difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and […] is not upon many occasions so much the *cause* as the *effect* of the division of labor. The difference […] seems not to arise so much from nature, as from habit, custom, and education" (170). Human nature was defined in classical political economy much as was life in science, as a capacity or susceptibility for a particular kind of difference dictated by the epistemological operation, and making free market liberalism into a life science that, in Youngquist's words, "adds the element of exchangeability to the cultural norm of embodiment" (xviii). It is no accident, of course, that the discourse of the rights of man emerged in the exemplary space of an economy of exchange, in the public sphere of the coffee house. Resonating with the discourse of indistinctions and motion I've drawn out above, David Lloyd has argued that the Subject of the public sphere, the Subject of commodity exchange, was unmistakably that Kantian "Subject without properties," the fetishized inverse of property, the life that could most circulate because stripped of materiality. It is this "without" that enables substitution, the empyting that makes motion primary, this foundational indistinction through which life is made exchangeable as thought. This performative or aporetic structure by which the distinctive or marked is produced through what is *made* indistinct or unmarked seems entirely accurate as a general description of what is happening in Romantic epistemologies of the life sciences and natural history.

history writing. William Bartram's 1791 *Travels*, like Smith's moral and political economy, repeats the productive pleasures of the spectatorial.

The happy meeting of the spectator's mind and natural processes is treated just as pleasantly as the master's machine, even when it meets its demise. The benign gaze of natural history finds just as much passive fascination when it becomes a spectator of decay and ruin:

> On Egmont estate, are several very large Indian tumuli, which are called Ogeeche mounts, so named from that nation of Indians, who took shelter here, after being driven from their native settlements on the main near Ogeeche river. Here they were constantly [harassed] by the Carolinians and Creeks, and *at length slain by their conquerors, and their bones entombed in these heaps of earth and shells. I observed here the ravages of the common gray caterpillar, so destructive to forest and fruit trees*, in Pennsylvania, and through the northern states, by stripping them of their leaves, in the spring, while young and tender (Phalena periodica).

This is an astonishing, but not entirely exceptional, passage from Bartram's text.[22] Here the history of settler colonialism is folded into the cycle of a nonhuman ecology that Bartram translates into taxonomy. Bartram's narrative moves frequently between such

[22] An almost exact replication of this description appears again later on, where Bartram writes of the colony in St. Mark's that "the aborigines of America, had a very great town in this place, as appears from the great tumuli, and conical mounds of earth and shells, and other traces of a settlement which yet remain. There grew in the old fields of these heights great quantities of Callicarpa and of beautiful shrub Annona: the flowers of the latter are large, white and sweet scented" (61).

temporal scales and literary genres, from genocide to disturbed ecology without missing a beat.

In so moving, it offers an impassive account of landscapes in a natural decay that includes the ossified remains of Native Americans as yet one more moment in the motion of nature. Both earth and forest bear traces of ruination, entombed in one and stripped down on another. Such ruination reads as internal to the operations of nature, which convert the violence of a particular historical moment into the sediment of another. This cult of the ruin in natural history provoked not so much the historical and terrifying trace that Adorno reads in the landscape painting, but instead neutralizes violence as a cyclical, indifferent occurrence like an infinitely substituting machine.[23] Decay is thus internalized or in Benjamin's words, spatialized, and naturalized rather than marking material change. Working in conjunction with the taxonomic in natural history, the incorporation of ruin and decay into the spatial design of natural history repeats the abstracting motions, the foundational indistinction, the metonymic order that fashions an economy of Life.

Bartram's narrative of natural history involves an indistinction at the level of generational and temporal cycles (rather than as a principle of underlying animation or exchange). Analogous to the process of Smith's spectator and master, this narrative makes exchangeable the genocide of the Creeks and the ravaging effects of the gray caterpillar upon local vegetation, accounted for through a similar spectator position but

[23] Early on, he offers a glimpse of that Romantic cult of ruins when he describes a British fortress, which was "perhaps most costly of any in North America of British construction: it is now in ruins, yet occupied by a small garrison; the ruins also of the town only remain; peach trees, figs, pomegranates, and other shrubs, grow out of the ruinous wall of the former spacious and expansive buildings […] it seems now recovering again" (40).

this time in nature.[24] Declaring himself also to be an indifferent eye on the gradual processes and cycles of nature, Bartram's historian, like Smith's spectators, substitutes interiority for exteriority, the psychological for the functional. Its indistinction between natural decay and the ruin of empire also asserts a curious temporality of which Charles White cautioned the student of natural history, writing that he "must not […] expect to find in uniform gradation" in nature, and that "it frequently happens […] that ascent or descent is not always by equal, but often irregular, steps" (vii).

Across these ambivalent indistinctions and accommodating ascents in discourses ranging from political economy to natural history we could trace a resonance with what Frantz Fanon, in writing on colonialism, would later describe as the twofold project of "configuration *and* classification" (3). While I am not trying to gather each of the examples above under the heading of colonialism, or even the biopolitical, Fanon's conjunction does seem helpful in mapping or schematizing a whole host of operations being elaborated throughout the Romantic period. The indistinction by which forms of life could be configured, and the substitutions through which they were classified stretches across the field of Life. And, quite, frequently, it seemed to leave no remainder within its economy, metaphorized as it was as a relation between inside and outside, between the psycho-physiological and the natural.

III. Poetic Life

[24] These instances in Bartram's *Travels* mark that shift in representations of subjectivity from the Enlightenment one of activity and mastery, as the benign mode of representation that Mary Louise Pratt describes under the title of "benign" imperialism or "planetary consciousness," through which certain modes of colonialism were narrated as passive, innocent, harmless, and even androgynous.

As with the discursive formations I have sketched above, Romantic poetry operates on indistinction, mobilizes endless substitutions, and treats life as a matter of motion. Recall, for instance, that de Man's description of the substitution of everything for everything else refers to lyric poetry. And as many critics have noted, Wordsworth and Coleridge's interest in meter had everything to do with their belief in poetry's potentially stimulating or diminishing effects on the body's motions.[25] Lastly, Wordsworth's *Preface* makes clear that the power of poetry is an operation on what otherwise would remain too common, too indistinct, in the language of man. Selection made the common out of the indistinctive.[26] Like distinctions made by habit, or for the sake of knowledge, "the tendency of metre" was "to divest language in a certain degree of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition" (609). To make the life of man natural, reality first had to be divested and unsubstantiated, reconstructed through the artificial gradation of taxonomy,

[25] Kevis Goodman's reading situates poetic meter in Wordsworth's poetry underlines the extent to which poetry and science was concerned with the matter of motion. As she writes, both "the most influential medical educator of the later eighteenth century and the progenitor of a 'science of rational criticism' for the arts shared the same therapeutic-aesthetic ideal: that equilibrium of force and motion that constitutes the 'happy adjustment of the internal nature of man to his external circumstances'" (352). However, she reads Wordsworth as something of a rogue physician in that his use of meter, even as recognized by Coleridge, was a "reminder that such adjustments between the internal nature of man and his external circumstances are not in all cases (or even in most cases) happy" (353). Noel Jackson too argues that Wordsworth was particularly sensitive to involuntary motions of association and sensation as the unconscious matter upon which poetry worked.

[26] William Keach reads this aspect of the *Preface* as the "arbitrary compositional power" that is both "voluntary" and "despotic," hinting at the exceptional nature by which common men are created in that text. Particularly in the age of the French Revolution, even a natural, common language, Keach suggests, has to be imposed—and Wordsworth knows it. In this way, poetic selection reveals how much what we take to be in common and natural to man once had to be posited and named as such, so that it can appear as what could have been assumed.

culture, or, in this case, meter. Thus, Romantic poets also theorized Life, alongside science and political economy, as it was put into motion in an indistinctive fashion.

But at times another dimension of substitution appeared in Romantic rhetoric. If, as I have been arguing, Life was oftentimes articulated as a motion of substitution, then it also happened that the writing of Life was often deanimated and undone by its perpetual indistinction. The substitutions mobilized by indistinction throughout Romanticism can appear endless, often even autopoeitic or self-grounding—at least self-perpetuating. But Romantic poetry often writes the breakdown between life and thought, a life at the limits of substitution incapable of totalizing. These instances remains politically suggestive for me because of their tendency to mark what fails to make substitution work and what is not automatically erased in the advances of modern innovation.

Percy Shelley's famously fragmented poem, "Triumph of Life," returns us to the problematic with which I began, while elaborating a counter-economic part of life. Its most famous line, "Then, what is Life?," repeats Thelwall's own. But in Shelley's poem this question comes 500 lines into the poem, rather than launching its inquiry. The term Life puts a retroactive point on a surplus of substitutions that advance before it, as if posed at the point of exhaustion, when form after form has already exceeded its metaphoric and explanatory capacity:

…—I became aware

Of whence those forms proceeded which thus stained
The track in which we moved; after brief space

From every form the beauty slowly waned,

“From every firmest limb and fairest face

The strength and freshness fell like dust, and left

The action and the shape without the grace

“Of life; the marble of youth was cleft

With care, and in the eyes where once hope shone

Desire like a lioness bereft

“Of its last cub, glared ere it died; each one

Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly

These shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blown

“In Autumn evening from a poplar tree—

Each like himself and like each other were,

At first, but soon distorted seemed to be

[…]

Mask after mask fell from the countenance

And form of all, and long before the day

“Was old, the joy which waked like Heaven’s glance

The sleepers in the oblivious valley, died,

And some grew weary of the ghastly dance

"And fell, as I have fallen by the way side,

Those soonest, from whom forms most shadows past

And least of strength and beauty did abide."—

"Then, what is Life?" I said… (516-544)

Shelley's "Triumph," is a history of Life told through procession. Its movement mediates Life through Rousseau and Revolution, Lucretius and natural philosophy, mechanism and vitalism. For de Man, this poem showed the power of Shelley's poetry to be a disfiguring one, in which History lost its vitality and became an instance "like death."

But the history of Life this poem tells is also, as de Man implies in his insistence on its fragmented condition, a history of remainders and of what is not eclipsed in the abstraction of substitution. Its allegory of history, repeatedly dividing sign from idea, arrives at a limit point of substitution, where forms as parts fall and are left aside in the procession of Life. Leading up to the question, "Then, what is Life?", Shelley's lines propose not that the problem of indistinction needs to be overcome in the production of a theory that would bracket and subsume its forms within a theory of Life. They track living forms as an atomized surplus, a kind of lumpenproletariat of Life, rendered expendable from within its movement. As a history of Life, these lines are remarkable for the superfluous remainders they attach to the motions of Life. This is not just history as

fragment, but history as the afterlife of a complete substitution that wants to be without remainder.

As these lines move forward and towards the ostensible metaphor of Life—that point where meaning will be established in the nonmeaning of metonymy—they generate an excess that substitution does not subsume or erasse. Each line moves forward with a trace of what is left behind: forms that "stain" and beauty "waned," action and shape left without life, the cleft in marble, the dust and leaves and shadows. "Each like himself and like each other were," each poetic motion of indistinction, is "soon" distorted in a hesitation of a totality that can be woven from that relation. The substitution of these lines gives off an uncanny remainder in the motion of Life, in a form of repetition that makes for an unfamiliar encounter. Shelley's lines leave something over from substitution, in a surplus of forms that "fell," "fell," "fell," "have fallen" by the wayside of its motions. The poem suggests that the problem of Life is not to find the principle that will organize a surplus of indistinct forms definitively as Life, but to grasp Life's production of forms as they are left over the posing of such a question. These lines find what is left over and exhausted from the procession of arriving at the question of Life. Forms fall outside the substitutions of life and death, failing to translate as parts for a whole, and keep falling, failing to be absorbed in a motion that might turn them into the thought of Life

The Life of these lines is uncanny in the sense I invoked above, in that Life appears as what is familiar and unfamiliar, obvious and hidden. It appears as a repetition or recurrence on the verge of revealing its source of trauma. Its uncanniness shows substitution to be irreducibly doubled and as a movement that proliferates distorted remainders. Life cannot only be an exchange or procession that leaps into labor, tends

towards invention, or is subsumed by thought. Forms remain here, return here as an afterlife that do not coincide entirely with substitution.[27]

Here Shelley is not so far from a concern over life that Gallagher argues was preeminent amongst classical political economist, who "privileged abeyant forms of vitality and feeling." This privileging was a product of an implicitly registered contradiction between the exchangeability of living bodies and the value production of capitalism, of having "rooted the exchange value of any commodity […] in biological need" (46). Theirs was a concern about how to supersede or abolish the remainder of material life. Shelley's "Triumph" remains with it, instead, as the persistent stain of Life. If Romantic poetry and political economy shared an imagination of society as a "vast, living system…[based] on the certitudes of vital needs," then Shelley's lines above approach the history of such thinking of certitude as an aporia in which certitude would have to be an assessment of how much in life can be left aside.

Romantic poetry perhaps most famously approaches the exhaustion of bodies and the conversion of life into a commodity in the individual or solitary figure of the beggar, the vagabond, the soldier, the widow or the wife. In "Triumph," the transformation of living things into Life is written at a more conceptual and formal level, pitched at the

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[27] There is undoubtedly a resonance here with what Giorgio Agamben has called a form-of-life. But unlike Shelley's formulation, for Agamben the most desirable form of life is one without remainder, where the coincidence of life and language reaches a complete recession of distinction. Such a form of life, as yet unseen, would be "an experience in which the life *that* has been lived is identified without remainder with the life *by which* it has been lived" (227). In contrast to the constitutive division written into *bios* and *zoe*, which Agamben understands as the central problematic of modern life, he argues that the most desirable form-of-life would be one in which the particularity of life would be irreducible from the means of its reproduction. Such an indistinction would be absolute in his terms, abolishing the juridical and constitutive indistinction of bare life in favor of an indistinction between the "means by which we live" and the way or the mode in which we live. In other words, a form of life would be the inseparability between something like social reproduction and singular living.

level of history. But what it foregoes in the specificity of discrete bodies and in the realm of representation it writes as the disfiguring movement of history as abstract equivalence, as complete substitutiblity, as a substitution exchanged with thought and understanding. It is here, at this level, that I try to think a riotous life within Romanticism, in lines that hint at the deanimation of surplus and the undoing of equivalence. It is in the ambivalence of a surplus that stills the logic of substitution and remains in movement when substitution loses its logic. These lines intensify an excess that is exhausted, an indistinction that is unclassifiable, and a motion that disrupts fascination. They envision a life cast aside, drained of vitality, and too weary to remain figured in the procession of Life—and yet, not unliving.

Throughout this project, I look to writing in which such a body economic is disfigured. It takes only a cursory reading of *Capital*, or many Victorian novels, to see that capitalism disfigures human bodies. Indeed, disfigurations of living bodies, of the kind I offer below and with which I began this introduction, are not unknown to classical political economy, either. Gallagher even describes Malthus' critique of Godwin's belief in an agricultural capacity to meet the needs of geometrically-expanding populations as a section where "monsters proliferate" and where "counterfactual beings are created as the possibilities of their existence are denied" (41). But what I try to contribute here is an approach to disfiguration as a language through which Romanticism traced the limits of substitution to provide for life, through counterfactual forms envisioned in the unlinking of life and substitution. Rather than referring life strictly to that sphere of reproduction or historicizing its subsumption by capitalist exchange and the circulation of commodities,

below I try to see what happens when the language of substitution breaks down as a seamless or "perfect machine."

Romantic poetry often approaches the notion, and the motion, of Life, then, through a persistent de-naturalization. Or it at least produced continual reminders of material parts that were used in the production of Life but that were not entirely subsumed by a *thinking* of it. That is, it continuously posits something in Life that is not for thought and that is not erased in the process of making Life into an epistemological project, a project that analogized life and perfect machines. It can ask us to read the repression in Romantic Life of what fails to substitute, resists circulation, disrupts equivalence as references to real political forms.

In choosing the term riotous here I have tried to think of such failures, and the frequency of that term in Romantic criticism, in a more distinctly political and historical way. To be sure, many studies of Romanticism have done the work of politicizing failure and the condition of what Agamben has famously called "bare life." Romanticism is a fascinating site in which to think this failure of life to be a political form, and many critique Agamben through Romanticism by challenging his reading of bareness was always already the product of sovereign law and juridical language. Such work finds instead that what fails to make a claim for the human subject is often the space in a certain survival or openness, anonymity or minimality is to be found. Figures of life that either refuse or fail to commit to the ideology of the political subject are be read, instead, as sites of alternative sociability, agency, and responsibility in a world where it seems increasingly difficult to not become the subject of law. In what Agamben calls the zone of indistinction, readers of Romanticism find conserved what cannot be registered,

represented, and made apparent within a world of the documented, recognized, and identified.

If what has been at stake in much deconstructively-oriented Romantic criticism in recent years is a persistent resistance to appearance, visibility, vitality, and agency, then I try to think political forms that operate through a resistance that is sometimes too sheltered by its literary instantiations. Where David L. Clark and Jacques Khalip frame an alternative path outside, from within, Romanticism's tendency towards "too much, too little" as a search for "the mark that could just as easily be over-looked as seen" (par. 4) or what Lily Gurton-Wachter calls "new rhythms of perception that stray from their objects and allow readers to notice the neutral, overlooked, or untouched" (193), I have tried to move toward a reading of such marks and rhythms as they provide access to the *longue duree* of struggles to wrest life from processes into which it seemed to disappear or be made insignificant. Romantic literature, and its inheritances in the contemporary, is incredibly significant for its capacity to draw our attention to such structures of disappearance as traces of life lived otherwise. In turning both to the concept and history of the riotous, I try to see in that otherwise the trace of a politics.

The extent to which literary disruption occurs not only within the idea of Life as such, but also enmeshed in the web of histories in which political disruption withdrew life from the abstracting substitutions of capital and empire. I try to supplement my readings with an eye towards the conditions that may have prompted us critically to find so much promise in the over-looked in the first place. Here I try to approach that promise somewhat more ambivalently, with an eye towards the dialectics through which material minimality also refers to a surplus, and towards the political unconscious into which a

struggle over the transformation of life disappears into the literary. That process is not most explicitly an aesthetic or epistemological one, but rather because it became productive throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to make matter disappear through the development of material processes that "tend toward invisibility as the practices it enables become familiar and routine" (Nemser 171). Thus, my focus has been on certain minor traces in Romanticism that might lead towards a better understanding of the immense transformations and resistances through which a need for a reading of the negligible was been called forth in the first place.

Here I have tried to lay out a general framework from within which such negations and disfigurations occur, one in which a language of substitution and indistinction traversed the life sciences, natural history, and political economy. In the most basic sense, this project accounts for something that happens from within it, through rhetorical instances of life that do not cohere or become subsumed by that logic. Instead, it organizes a series of disfigurations in which substitution is broken apart or comes undone. If life was largely organized through this logic, as I have tried to argue above, then riotous life tropes the end of life's substitution. It tries to approach form instead through disfiguration, through the letter, through a materiality whose resistance to abstraction is made available at the end of Life.

IV. Overview of Chapters

I wish the foresight of a preface had been available before I wrote each of my chapters. I would have written them differently. But what follows takes up, in less

systematic way, strands of what I have set out above. I feel convinced that each is motivated by an engagement with the figuration of life through substitution and its disruption into a more radical indistinction between the human and nonhuman, between life and understanding.

The first two chapters follow most closely the intersection of rhetoric, science, and political economy that I have traced above. But they are situated in quite different contexts. The context of the first piece I read is proto-industrial England and that of the second is the British empire. In both I consider how certain threshold figures, first between the machine and human and then the plant and human, at times both affirm and disrupt their metonymic relation to industry and empire. In both chapters I consider the ways in which certain categories of human life were made *less* than human by way of designation as indistinct in relation to either mechanical or plant life. But I also read certain instances of indistinction between man and machine, man and plant as destructive to the final instance in which distinctions will be put into operation.

I situate an early lecture by S.T. Coleridge, in which he figures rioters as mechanistic. Coleridge's language is informed by Enlightenment-era theories of cognition and the optimism of reason, from within which he includes the poor only in futural and deferred way. Evacuated of volition at the moment, rioters are subjects to—and not of—history. And yet, as I argue, Coleridge's prefatory apostrophe to Famine marks a different political temporality than that a progressive movement towards an Enlightened future. Instead, it stalls history in the immediate demands of the now that are made by need rather than reified reason, in which the demands of reproduction undo political economy's production of need into a matter of equivalence and stasis.

Analogously, my reading of Shelley's "The Sensitive Plant" argues for another instance of indistinction that turns riotous, in what I argue should be read as an allegory colonial sovereignty and primitive accumulation. In their mockery of the human, Shelley's uprising of underground "forms of living death" find analogy with colonial narratives of slave marronage that threatened the landscape of empire with a contagious destruction. These first two chapters both seek to unsettle a purely representation reading of the nonhuman and its usefulness in maintaining hierarchies of difference. Instead, of reading these conflations as they were used in the service of teleological histories, I treat indistinctions that trace the limits points to its ability to identify life with representation. Thus, while acknowledging the ways that the nonhuman has long been a representational tool of exploitation and domination, these first two chapters seek to highlight the ways that indistinction could take both imperial and anti-colonial, bourgeois and anti-capitalist modes. If, as Benjamin, Derrida, and others argue, representation indexes the decline inherent to the positing and preserving of law, then I attempt to think the nonhuman as it disfigures the human and its history as an index of a destruction of that dialectic. These chapters thus treat history in its nonhuman and contingent mode, which de Man reconciled with an authentic and non-nostalgic history. The riotous in those chapters draw into focus the emphasis on contestation and struggle that I mentioned above, namely through the events of what E.P. Thompson called "the transitional riot" and accounts of the Maroon Wars in Suriname. These two chapters draws together a history of a nonhuman nature, whose threshold forms of life promise destruction to the history of the human.

The third chapter deals with an outlier in Romanticism, Giacomo Leopardi. Leopardi is difficult, if not impossible, to locate within the contexts through which I read Shelley and Coleridge. The territory that would become Italy was far from industrializing in Leopardi's lifetime, and it was subject to imperial conquest rather than agent of it at the time. Thus, while Antonio Negri has read Leopardi as the poet *par excellence* of certain features of nineteenth-century and contemporary capital, namely what Marxists call formal and complete subsumption, I do not situate Leopardi primarily within the Romantic-era capital and empire that contextualizes my first two chapters. But while Leopardi's poetry does not respond directly or immediately to the transformations in life I treat there, its materialist figuration of history and nature suggests that our desire to translate human life into a progressive or teleological form obscures the potential to make a collective home on destroyed terrain. For Leopardi, not unlike Nietzsche or even Freud, we are fated to live in such destruction because of our own, unfortunate origins as thinking, conscious beings. Leopardi is interesting here for ways in which he asks us to accommodate disrupted history as a treatment for the tragedy of those origins rather than continuously devising histories that might save us from it.

In this third chapter I take up recent efforts to read Leopardi within a more traditional Romanticism of nostalgia and a cultural recuperation of the past. Indeed, for some critics Leopardi serves as a paradigmatic Romantic *because* of his exclusion from the national centers of Romanticism, inasmuch as this absence provided the means for a more pure or complete transcendentalism in either cosmopolitan or historical terms. In other words, Leopardi was able to substitute a cultural unity for a historical lack, turning the ruins of the present into the presence of an either national or transnational future.

Ultimately, I read nostalgia in Leopardi not as a totalizing reflection of the past that judges the present lacking and in need of restoration, but rather in line with a more materialist condition offered by Romantic-era physiology. As a physical condition of disrupted association, nostalgia gives us a way to read the continuous temporal disruptions and figures destructive of knowledge that occur in his late poem "La Ginestra" (The Broom Plant) in materialist rather than idealist terms. I use this "counter-history" of nostalgia to argue that Leopardi's sense of man's destroyed fate has a curative potential, and as a demand that material life can only survive in the ruins of an anthropocentric humanism. Leopardi's critique of human reason as a fragile fabrication, his acute sense of its defensive and immunizing effects on life, and his embrace of transience and temporal finitude perhaps comes the closest in Romantic poetry to apprehending life, therapeutically, as a product of ruin.

My fourth chapter turns to Karl Marx's 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* and another temporal disruption forced by a fundamental indistinction of human and animal life we find there. Reading Marx with an eye towards our contemporary moment of economic and climatological finitude, I reread his derision of immediate animal need in favor of the future of conscious life through a reversal. Instead, I propose that the irreducible repetition of biological need disfigures that text in such a way that opens out to a politics of rioting rather than revolution, one that is more suited to life today. Here again I take up the deconstruction of the binary between the human and nonhuman that structures Romantic rhetoric, reading Marx's concept of "species being" or *Gattungwesen* through the inescapability of the former from the latter. The term "species being" most explicitly signifies the determination of the human species through

the foreclosure of the animal, whose needs are subsumed by the singularity of conscious design and intention. But the figurative construction of that concept within the *Manuscript* is almost always given as a chiasmus, thus staking the life of man on inversion and exchange and putting it into an uncertain relation to animal life in its alienated form. Rather than ask how that relation might be overcome, I look to instances that disfigure Marx's identification between the human form and conscious life and in which man, like Marx's understanding of animal life, remains irreducibly determined by need. Such need, and its historical association with the nonhuman, indexes an immediacy and demand posed by material life that is more appropriate to a contemporary economic and ecological landscape far beyond the mediation of conscious control. Marx's intimation of the future life of the human through animal need slips, even if only briefly, into a politics effected by the termination of consciousness and the demands of life.

In conclusion, I should say that I do not want to claim for the nonhuman some kind of immanent or redemptive potential, or invest it with a hope for forms of life that somehow escaped the overlapping violences dreamed up by and through the Romantic human. Paul Youngquist cautions against any such investment in monstrosity, or what is made aberrant in relation to the human, as a "[vision] of excess or dreams of utopia." For him, the aporetic structure of histories of exclusion and normality, however performative, cannot provide us with symbols or metaphors that escapes the material processes of being made monstrous. At the same time, I cannot fail to note that discussions of constituent power, of crowds and multitudes, of forces against empire and capital frequently appear as not-quite human forms, as collective figures suspended somewhere between the human

and nonhuman and that require the supplement of the nonhuman in order to be imagined as a political force.

What I have tried to think in this dissertation, then, is not the recoverable potential of forms of life that were, historically, designated as nonhuman and that might now be recovered in the service of life today. Instead, I have turned to certain instances of the literary that register a "contestation over the viability" of life inasmuch as the processes that make it most visible and general are also responsible for its disappearance and deanimation.

The chapters that follow draw from a longstanding literary fascination with the irreducibility of textual disruption (cognitive, narrative, and formal), which has often been the most political implication of deconstructive readings of Romanticism, to turn back to the matter of history. The difficulty I have found myself in with this project, has been to understand how the most extreme of literary conditions might be used to think a political mode, or to have a correlation with a politics that fail to appear in history. Perhaps the simplest way to say this is that the challenge of this project has been to try, and fail, to remain undecideably committed to the literary and the historical.

The riotous has proved a useful term for such a project, even if, in the end, it does not prove to have a consistent definition across my chapters. It has helped to designate a limit point shared across the literary and political, one at which life remains perched at the edge of what is simultaneously dismissed and made inconsequential *and* that is constitutive and irreducible. It is through this knot or paradox that we can draw together the ways in which life became a political problem in the Romantic period, produced through abstractions that failed to eclipse some residue of its materiality.

V. Conclusion

Just briefly, I want to say something about the form and internal coherence of the dissertation. There is perhaps no shortage of irony in the fact that my dissertation title includes the word riotous. The relation between one chapter and the next here will sometimes seem to perform it. Its riotous qualities emerge, I think, from what may on the one hand seem to be trying to do too much, and on the other to take seriously both the rhetorical and historical dimensions of the project. Nonetheless, there are times when these dimensions fall out of balance. In both the chapters on Leopardi and Marx, their own historical context feels decidedly against the readings I have produced of them. The worlds of pre-Risorgimento Italy and post-Hegelian Germany, neither of which I am as knowledgeable about as eighteenth and nineteenth-century England, felt less hospitable to rhetorical reading than did the latter. In those latter cases, it fell to the physiological and the present historical to provide a more conceptual and hesitant idea of the political. And in both instances, especially throughout the revision process, I felt the distance between my own readings and what could be called a legitimation most clearly. I do not mean this as an apology, but more so as an acknowledgment that those readings are working on a more unconscious or latent material than the former—most likely just as much my own material as that made available by the texts themselves. It is also to acknowledge that those readings end up with more general claims than the former—if they are working on a more unconscious level, then their diagnoses are not clinical ones

meant for individual patients but more tentative hypotheses that will require further cases for review.

Throughout I have proceeded with some sense of uncertainty inasmuch as my expectations of what my readings might emerge with felt entirely undecided in advance. Such uncertainty, and my own resistance to treating each text with a determined lens, has produced some discontinuity across chapters too. In close reading, I have tried to avoid reading selectively in order to make a point. Instead, it has felt necessary to work through large parts of the texts with which I engage in order to know how they do or do not bear out a certain moment of interest to me. In situating these texts, I have tried to treat history and context not as a backdrop, but as much in need of elaboration and uncertainty as the poetry and other writing I address. Sometimes caught up in the smallest details of close reading, sometimes trying to think science, political economy, language and history all at once, this project has wanted to keep all possible resources, all possible possibilities on the table. Where it feels the limits of one, it tends to pivot to another. Its strongest and weakest points emerge from that tendency.

S.T. Coleridge's *Conciones Ad Populum*: Apostrophe, Mechanism, Reproduction

I. *Conciones Ad Populum* and the Rhetoric of Apostrophe

In February 1795 S.T. Coleridge delivered a series of lectures in Bristol, on most accounts in the Bristol Corn Market. These lectures, published later that year under the title *Conciones Ad Populum*. *Conciones*, or *Addresses to the People*, might be the closest that Coleridge came to ever writing a book to the laboring classes. As Ian Balfour notes, that book was promised by, but never completed, his 1816 *Statesman's Manual: the Bible…a lay sermon addressed to the higher classes of society.* Where the latter was addressed to the higher classes, here I want to argue that *Conciones*, despite its failure to directly address the working classes, nonetheless tropes the remaking of life that was a precondition of working class formation and the fractured historical conditions of it. My argument is that the long and destructive reorganization of life in the eighteenth century should be thought along the lines of power that Paul de Man associated with language, as a "strength that cannot be reduced to necessity, and entirely inexorable in that there is no alternative to it" ("Shelley Disfigured" 116). I propose that it is through such a notion of life as an arbitrarily inexorable force that we can locate a Romantic disruption of what otherwise would appear as an ideology of history, on the other side, that is determined *and* full of alternatives never taken.

Given in the wake of extreme national and continental strife—not long after Robespierre's trial and execution in 1794 and amidst the Pitt government's suspension of

Habeas Corpus and its oppression of members of the London Corresponding Society—the *Conciones* were delivered at a time when

> the price of provisions […]; crop failures, unseasonable cold, diminished imports, and dwindling supplies by Aug turned 1795 into a near-famine year. In June in Birmingham, owing to the dearness of provisions a mob 1000 strong stormed a flour mill and bakehouse, plundering it for bread. Similar riots occurred in other cities and towns, wherever large numbers of able-bodied men were forced to apply for poor-relief. [28]

As E.P. Thompson described it, Coleridge's context of "1795 and 1800 saw the efflorescence of a regional consciousness once more, as vivid as that from a hundred years before. Roads were blockaded to prevent export from the parish. Wagons were intercepted and unloaded in the towns through which they past […] Threats were made to destroy the canals. Ships were stormed at the ports" (333). Soon after the year of those lectures, between 1799 to 1832, England "came as close as it had ever been to revolution since the seventeenth century" (Archer 89).

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[28] This footnote could include a number texts on the precarious moment of 1790s, a year that threads together the remnants of feudalism, oscillations between active and suspended foreign wars, intense state oppression of internal critics, a massive food shortage, and the significant transitions towards the formal subsumption of capital. Other relevant texts that discuss this moment would include, in literary studies, David Collings *Monstrous Society*, Mary Fairclough's *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture*, Ian Haywood's *Bloody Romanticism*: *Spectacular Violence and the Politics of Representation 1777-1832* and Georgina Green's *The Majesty of the People: Popular Sovereignty and the Role of the Writer in the 1790s*; historical texts on this moment might include Perry Andersen, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* and his "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" and Peter Linebaugh's *The London Hanged*.

Here I look to these Romantic riots as the site of life and history I just suggested above, where the historical transformation that Thompson alludes to is separated from historical determination. While Coleridge's direct context for the lectures was the French Revolution, his indirect references intermingle with contemporary riots, making those events inseparable. Riots and revolution intermingled in the Romantic period, tinging the former with apocalyptic tones and the later with anarchic tendencies. If the Revolution was at the forefront of Coleridge's mind then here I want to suggest that the waves of riots that rolled through 1795 are in its unconscious. Ian Haywood has argued somewhat similarly that "the Gordon riots, not the French revolution…put the image of the 'revolutionary crowd' firmly in the public eye and 'formed part of the consciousness which people carried into the revolutionary era'" (190).[29] He argues that this conflagration was part of the general phenomenon of "spectacular violence" that characterized Romantic print culture, thus creating a reactionary representation of insurrection as a "pathological uprising" in which "rationality and political will are submerged between infantilist excess and anarchy" (118).

Here I turn to Coleridge to offer a slightly different tack on rationality and will in the Romantic time of riots. I begin with the year 1795, fifteen years after the Gordon Riots, and with Coleridge's lectures to make the case for a politics not that doubles down

[29] In contrast, Saree Makdisi has interprets read the riots as an expression of Spinozean subjectivity, in which "being together, being in common, [through] the relationship of bodily or sensual pleasure" enabled a radical politics that cannot otherwise be found in the individualist, rationalist politics of Godwin, Thelwall, and Wollstonecraft. He argues that William Blake is singular within a nineteenth century context for apprehending and extolling such subjectivity in art. But I suggest that when the mechanistic materialism of eighteenth century thought collided with the riot, a deep anxiety over its political potential was expressed, not out of concern for "being in common" or "sensual pleasure" but due to the (instability) of transformation of life conceived mechanically into mechanized reproduction.

on the negation of rationality and will rather than finding ways of restoring these to political action. This resistance is in part an attempt to inhabit what E.P. Thompson terms the "transitional moment" of the late eighteenth century to draw out the full contingency that it implies. This moment was no longer that of the food riot and what Thompson saw as the "equilibrium" of power between crowds and authority in what he called the moral economy of the crowd. I look to the reorganization of life and reproduction through the reason and abstract equilibrium of the free market to find a politics of life in the destruction of such terms, one that does not reinscribe the humanist terms of rationality, will, and conscious volition. I am interested instead in theorizing a politics of that life that emerges from what de Man and others have considered the destructive and nonhuman force of language within the abstractions of material life during the Romantic period.[30] In part, this is also an attempt to think through that moment of disruption and violence that was always necessarily obscured or displaced in the production of a rational and voluntarist subject in the Enlightenment or the free and rights-bearing subject of Romanticism and to consider what other political forms and temporalities might emerge from remaining with the rigor of its negation.

Much recent literature on Romantic riots and revolution has tended towards an interest in questions of representation, namely through theories of sympathy and communication exchanged between print culture and riotous crowds.[31] Indeed, it seems

[30] Here I am thinking primarily of de Man's critique of the Schillerian sublime and the way that it chooses reason over material life, thus producing an ultimately immaterial concept of life so as to avoid the the finitude and mortality of the material. See "Kant and Schiller," *Aesthetic Ideology.*
[31] This reading of the political as a mode of communication is not particular to Romantic literary criticism. See Jodi Dean's *Crowds and Party* for a more contemporary assessment of political action, particularly a politics that resists representation, as a product of what she calls communicative capitalism.

significant that both Georgina Green's *The Majesty of the People: Popular Sympathy and the Role of the Writer in the 1790s* and Mary Fairclough's *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy, and Print Culture* consider the politics of rioting and constituent power alongside a language of sympathy shared between print culture and physiology. My contention is that such accounting for political histories, while critical of representation, nonetheless tend to produce more complex and nuanced versions of it rather than proposing fundamentally different ones. Representation is thus valorized for what it fails to achieve or account for and politics emerges in the space of that failure but always still in relation to representation. The notion of the Romantic riot follows much the same trajectory, recuperating what might appear to be irrational or unthinking action into a collective mode of sympathy, unity and intentionality. Even while invoking terms of sympathy and sensations, terms associated in the Romantic period with a preconscious or affective register, such studies tend to value Romantic riots for their ability to reform, inform or correct political representation. Similarly, Ian Haywood's *Bloody Romanticism: Spectacular Violence and the Politics of Representation, 1775-1832* and David Collings *Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny, c. 1780-1848* are also concerned with the uses and abuses of representation. Again, these studies take the domain of the symbolic, in Collings case, or of print culture, in Haywood's case, as the sites in which political bodies or actions become unrepresentable in texts or images. Their work, in a sense, is to restore what has been left out or repressed, to, in Collings words, correct for a "distortion of reciprocity" or to remind us that representation structures the political consciousness of subjects and publics.

I take a more negative approach to both the riot by turning to eighteenth and nineteenth century theories of life emergent in materialist and economic thought, in order to insist upon a politics that deconstructs a regime of the rational or of representation as a horizon. Thinking rhetorically is particularly helpful here, inasmuch as rhetorical reading is consistently concerned with the evacuation of power from agency, reason and communication as *starting point* for understanding the violence and eventfulness of history. In keeping with this method I turn to a rhetorical reading of riots and the figures of life in this chapter in order to resist that movement from riot to life to understanding, thus staving off the metonymy the human and the state that subtends it. Coleridge's rhetoric, and Romantic rhetoric more generally, pushes us away from the determining effect upon politics of reason and intention without abandoning the fact of overdetermination. Riots and life involved in them are particularly good sites in which to negotiate this position. They are entirely Romantic in the way that they seem to be suspended beside what Balfour has written of a Romantic rhetoric that to "[suggests] conscious action and volition" but is "at the same time beyond the control and comprehension" (44). Balfour captures what is most useful about a rhetorical treatment of radical politics, then, which is a sense of power that is not agentic, but that is transformative, a feeling of immediacy and a capacity that is not the product of conscious control but that draws us into believing, nonetheless, that there might be an end to things as they are—to a "*beyond*" to "volition."

This reading locates the force of the nonhuman as a violence upon such substitutions, enacted in the relation between riot and life. Put in Joshua Clover's words, "if the riot raises the question of reproduction, it does so as negation" (*Riot* 29). It is the

force of such negativity within life as a site of representation or improved governance that I seek to locate. Here I address this question of the negative through Coleridge's use of apostrophe in his prefatory letter to the lectures. I do so for two reasons. First, apostrophe's tendency to produce the appearance of animacy while deanimating human presence constellates a series of transformations in life in the eighteenth century. Here I am less concerned with apostrophe's effect upon the speaker or poet and rather in its ability to figure both what Sara Guyer has called a relation of coincidence and what Jonathan Culler has described as a "saying of the now."

Apostrophe relies on a dialectical interaction between direct and indirect speech, which usefully formalizes the relation between politics and political economy at the time of Coleridge's speech. That is, it tropes the violent movement from feudal into waged labor that occurred during the Romantic period, the relationship between the direct violence of enclosure, industrialization and impoverishment along with the indirect means of reproduction accomplished by the wage as freely entered contract. Apostrophe articulates the vexed tendencies of Jacobin and anti-capitalist politics in the Romantic riot together without reducing them to one or the other, thus formalizing the multiplicitous procedures by which the impoverishment of life opened out into new modes of political struggle. Apostrophe's troping of performative effect, of a force that cannot predict or guarantee, retains a violence against the determinacy of that history and draws our attention to the political function of not what fails to signify but what is non-signifying.

Apostrophe's positing of an indeterminacy between speaker and addressee, between the living and the dead, the human and the nonhuman does something that Romantic histories of riots perhaps cannot do. Apostrophe suspends the direction of

relations, thus instantiating a radical levelling amongst speakers and things, subjects and objects without demanding a mediation by which the latter acquires speech and subjecthood to have its effects. This is why, perhaps, figurative language always hints at that violence to that seamless movement between life and the state that I mentioned just above.[32] Like Adorno's love for the ruin in landscape art, I insist here on a life that empties out the demand to be human, to be productive, to be rational and is aligned instead with destructive reproduction.

II. Impulsive Machines

Although initially intended only to be delivered as speeches, Coleridge promptly decided to circulate *Conciones* in print form to defend himself from rumors that he was fostering an insurrectionary spirit. Upon reading the lectures, it seems that nothing could be further from the truth—keeping close to the mechanistic philosophy of David Hartley and Joseph Priestley (after him), Coleridge argues for a proper balance to regulate the conjoined motions of mind and body. Throughout the lectures he is at pains to avoid any direct address to the poor, who he worries are ripe for riotous actions in a manner akin to the sympathetic resonance of animal spirits. He argues instead that: "We […] should plead *for* the Oppressed, not *to* them" (43). And he cautions that "We should be bold in the avowal of *political* Truth among those only whose minds are susceptible of reasoning: and never to the multitude, who *ignorant and needy* must necessarily act from the *impulse of inflamed Passions*" (my emphasis 51). An immediate binary is set up here

[32] Here I am thinking of Barbara Johnson's provocative question, "But are the politics of violence already encoded in rhetorical figures as such?" ("Apostrophe" 29).

within an otherwise monist and materialist framework. In contrast to opposed to the immediacy of action, or more properly reactions, that are prompted by materials needs, reason indicates a mediation between time and motion. (Material comfort seems to suggest the acquisition of time where hunger enacts impoverished time.) And where reason is a regulated and even deferred action, Coleridge associates the poor with mechanism that is instantaneous, impoverished even of duration. The materialist conjunction between internal and external is explicitly classed through material conditions, and where the enlightened can apprehend a rational relation between the two the poor mistake the immediate, "inflamed" effects of stimuli for a reality that others feel as a more totalizing and interrelated one. Pleas cannot be made directly, then, because the multitude react the most mechanically to those sensations prompted entirely externally: "Possessing no stock of happiness [the poor] *eagerly seize* the gratifications of the moment, and *snatch* the froth from the wave as it passes them by […] unsoftened as they are by education, and benumbed into selfishness by the *torpedo touch* of extreme Want." (my emphasis 45).

The language that Coleridge uses demonstrates that in mechanistic accounts life is always a matter of reaction and response, but that the quality of reaction matters. Complicating this fact is the slippage that occurs materialist physio-psychology in which the quality of reaction is determined by the socio-historical quality of external conditions. It is on the basis of this philosophy of life that Coleridge, along with many others, would advocate for a politics of sympathy or sensibility, which was an intervention into the production of political subjects through habituation in an evermore progressive social order. Even voluntary or conscious action is figured as passive, in those minds that are

susceptible to the influence of reason. We are dealing with an economy of reactions or, as Wendy Lee puts it, a condition in which "both motion and rest are changes of state caused by the exertion of other bodies" (1408). Nonetheless, within the spectrum of response to external stimuli that Coleridge constructs here, the oppressed seem to have no capacity for accumulating it into reason. What they grasp hold of, "froth," is as temporary and superfluous as the very reaction of snatching. If "feelings are situations that unfold over time" as Lee argues, then reason clearly is here too, and the distinction between thinking subjects and impulsive machines is less a condition of agency and more one of the accumulation of time.

Coleridge clearly relies on similar eighteenth-century medical and physiological theories of bodily mechanisms. Less clear is how such a mechanism works when bodies become figures for social progress and historical direction. The slippage between physical and historical motions is important to note here, as it is one that plagued later socialist thought too, and which flattens what Kevis Goodman calls a "monist conception of the entire body as a network [in which] 'motions' course in both directions of this incessantly active system" (350)[33] In other words, the dialectics of inside and outside, material conditions and reactions to them, become collapsed into a determinate and unidirectional machine in the account I have given from Coleridge above. This account, like so many pseudo-materialist ones since, tend to reinscribe a dualism, or what Derrida might call a uniqueness, within an otherwise monist account of life. A complex economy of motions, emotions and material needs thus becomes an ahistorical and unmediated one in the case of the oppressed. If there are moments in which Coleridge is entirely attentive

[33] See Michael Löwy's, *The Theory of Revolution in Young Marx.*

to the precarious mediations of life and history, bodies and political events, this is not one of them.

In this conflation, which is also a division, Coleridge joins any number of eighteenth-century political thinkers who treated the poor through a mechanistic framework in which physical reaction was equated with a poverty of mental motion. Bodies became allegories for history in which the multitudes function as a kind of persistent state of nature within culture. Such images of mechanistic man as emblems of the state of nature reproduce Julian Offray de La Mettrie's position in *Man as Machine*, that: "1) the more *ferocious* animals are, the less brain they have; 2) this organ seems to grow, as it were, in relation to their docility; 3) [and] that what is gained on the side of intelligence is lost on the side of instinct" (10).[34] Here the grasp of material need is entirely reactionary. The hand of the oppressed is not even its own agent of seizure—it is numb and passive, brought into action only by the stimulus of Want or need. In his diagnosis, the poor are impulsive machines, empty-handed because they are empty of thought, and empty of thought because empty-handed. Wendy Lee had described such mechanistic and materialist accounts of life, which she traces back to Hobbes, as an "ontology of life, cognition, emotion, and action [that] are continuous and inseparable phenomena." Such ontologies presumed that, and here she cites Thomas Spragens, "intellectual faculties as well as the emotional strivings of living creatures are, at bottom,

[34] "Docility" in La Mettrie is also a product of association, in which the relations established between different images, sounds, signs and events produce understanding over time. And as in Priestley, and differently in Coleridge, understanding is inherently linguistic and semiotic: "As we can see, there is nothing simpler than the mechanism of our education! It all comes down to sounds, or words, which are transmitted from one person's mouth, through another's ear and into his brain, which receives at the same time through his eyes the shape of the bodies for which the words are the arbitrary signs" (13).

nothing but motion" (1405). Coleridge's indirection suggests a concern that the correlation between cognition and intellectual faculties with bodily movement might be less continuous and more instantaneous, less associated and more spontaneous. Thus, he avoids stimulating excited response and aims at a rhetorical therapeutics that will keep his audience's motions regulated.[35] He chooses to turn away from the Oppressed, rhetorically, to speak to an audience that promises calm motion rather than impulsive reaction.

Coleridge's impulsive machines are split between physiological bodies and figures of history, though. Another way to say this is that these materialist theories do not remain strictly material. The difference between reaction and motion that they suggest reminds us of what William Keach has called the "interactive doubleness" of the arbitrary and power that was operative in the Romantic-era, in which "what is initially random and contingent becomes absolute, or conversely through which absolute will and authority give way to the random and contingent" (4). While Coleridge's description above seems to suggest that the impulsive machines of the poor are of concern primarily for themselves, in the rest of the lecture it becomes clear that the time they figure, one of unthinking and arbitrary motions, as a substitution for a competing notion of historical absolutes. They become a site of negotiation over the proper time of revolution and its mediation in voluntary motion. In other words, Coleridge worries about the possibility that the "random and contingent" reactions of the oppressed might also index of a

[35] We can see a similar logic at play in the much later *Biographia Literaria,* in which Kevis Goodman finds a theorization of poetry as a medical stimulant. She quotes Coleridge on poetic meter in a description that is quite symmetrical to the prosaic attempt of *Conciones*: it is a "'stimulant to the attention,' operating 'as a medicated atmosphere, or wine during an animated conversation'" and has "'the property of exciting a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose…'" ("Reading Motion" 349).

historical temporality that is neither associative or progressive. This becomes clearer when the physiological fades into a semi-Burkean theory of aesthetics in which "The mind is predisposed by its situations [and] some unmeaning term generally becomes the Watch-word, and acquires an almost *mechanical power over his frame.* The *indistinctness of Ideas associated* with it increases its effect as 'objects look gigantic through a mist'" (my emphasis 53).[36] The Watch-word of which Coleridge speaks is an explicitly revolutionary one that forces a relation between what we saw above as the arbitrary grasp and a historical principle: "The favorite phrases of the present Day are—'It may be very well in theory' and the 'effects of Jacobine Principles'" (53).[37] Instantaneous and arbitrary reactions acquire the connotations of a Kantian aesthetic sensorium ('objects look gigantic through a mist') or a more general state of perception, a challenge to the sense of what is held in common.

Coleridge's seemingly transparent descriptions about the mechanistic impulses of the poor exemplify the conflationary work of bare life as an index of sovereignty or the need for it. David L. Clark and Jacques Kahlip have recently argued something similar in regards to Romantic representations of poverty that "conflate bare life with natural life" in "the mirage of the subject who is […] compelled to be both scarcely human *and* the

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[36] Keach cites Peter Furniss on this aesthetic point, who links Burke's theory of the sublime to his understanding of Revolution and as a matter of "'the people's susceptibility to the sublime'" (16). But Burke's assessment of the 1795 food shortage and the ensuing riots express a similar unconscious position of the aesthetic unleashed during those events: "There is no weak, no wild, no violent project, which did not find countenance in some quarter or other. The fall of the market immediately after the harvest, and the subsequent risk […] increased the public agitation; and the multitude began to pursue their usual course of providing in the shortest way for their instance wants, or of terrifying, or punishing those, whom they had been taught to consider as their oppressors" (60)

[37] This was perhaps part of the reason why Coleridge, along with numerous other eighteenth century materialists, saw the cultivation of sympathy and education as a political project, and why here Coleridge emphasizes "the necessity of cultivating benevolent affections," "sympathetic passions" and "irresistible habits" amongst Patriots.

most human" (par. 6.1). The rhetorical indirection Coleridge deploys in the lectures formalizes this arrangement, both centering and displacing bare life in the field of politics. And yet it is clear from the above that Coleridge sense the possibility of its destabilization of that management in an alternative arrangement of arbitrary power and a life that is simultaneously more and less than human.

III. Associationist Machines

If Coleridge's *Conciones* raises questions about how a mind become susceptible of reasoning or what prepares bodies for calm, continuous motion rather than reactions in the moment, then Joseph Priestley's 1775 "Of the doctrine of association in general" provides the textbook for our answer. In contrast to the non-signifying grasp of impulsive machines, Priestley provides a short manual on the semiotics of the signifying hand. While it is perhaps best known through the iteration articulated in Locke's chapter "Of the Association of Ideas," Coleridge was most directly influenced by David Hartley's version. Although associationism's implications were often tailored by each specific proponent, and were wide-ranging in application, in general associationism understood cognition, language, and voluntary action to be the product of repetitive and accumulated physical impressions made upon the nervous system and the mind, or the "soul."[38] Thus, what would come to be a complex organization of thoughts and rational action in the world could be traced back to original impressions initiated by an external and mechanical force. Indeed, at least as Coleridge understood it later in *Biographia*

[38] See Kevis Goodman, "'Uncertain Disease': Nostalgia, Pathologies of Motion, Practices of Reading," *Studies in Romanticism*, 49.2 (Summer 2010), 197-227.

Literaria, associationism was an entirely mechanistic philosophy that was inherited from Hobbes and Descartes, which they derived from Aristotle.[39]

In "Of the doctrine of associationism in general," Joseph Priestley makes clear that the influence of association over human culture could not be overestimated: "all that has been delivered by the ancients and moderns, concerning the power of habit, custom, example, education, authority, party-prejudice, the manner of learning the manual and liberal arts, &c. goes upon this doctrine as its foundation, and may be considered as the detail of it, in various circumstances" (14-15). In other words, if associationism was at its basis an understanding of how bodies worked, then it also unfolded into an understanding of how knowledge accumulated over time and how history was produced. It provided an account not only of the mechanism for individual human understanding but also an epistemology of the production of knowledge over vast stretches of time.

At the basis of this expansive theory, though, was one, simple event: the sensation or impression. Sensations were the response of internal organs to the impact of external objects. They were the immediate reaction of bodies to stimuli. Following Locke, Hume, Hartley and others, Priestley describes the translation process of such arbitrary reactions into more complex ideas as the result of repetition and duration. Thus there is a temporal theory within associationism that enabled the transformation of immediate and single sensations into the regularity of habit, custom, education, etc.[40] Time is the regulating and

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[39] See Coleridge, "Chapter V," *Biographia Literaria*, "In association then consists the whole mechanism of the reproduction of impressions, in the Aristotelian psychology. It is the universal law of the passive fancy and mechanical memory; that which supplies to all other faculties their objects, to all thought the elements of its materials" (212).

[40] Kevis Goodman describes Erasmus Darwin's account of the movement from automatic to voluntary motion as prompted through stimulation in the following way: "Darwin contrasts volition most immediately with 'sensation,' where the 'change or exertion' starts in the extremities of the sensorium, then produces 'sensitive motions' in the muscles or organs, and

organizing agent that yields ideas from impressions, transitioning the mind from a passive or reactive medium to an organizing and persisting one:

> if a single sensation *can* leave a perceptible effect, trace, or vestige, for a short time, a sufficient repetition of a sensation *may* leave a perceptible effect of the same kind, but of a more permanent nature, i.e. an idea, which shall recur occasionally, at long distances of time, from the impression of the corresponding sensation (13)

Duration provided the conditions in which correlations or associations were made into what Lorraine Daston has called the "normal psychology" of associationism. Sensation prompted physiological response which, over time, became more permanent through repetition and, later, was organized into complex chains of association. The operative division that made associationist functional, from Hobbes to Priestley, was between naturally associating ideas with real affinity and unnatural associations that, as Martin Kallich writes, "have logically nothing in common and have been thrown together by chance" (290). This distinction accounted for and secured the individual process of learning and, as Daston argues, a probabilistic epistemology for the empirical sciences. Originary sensations also prompted voluntary or willful action. If sensation first impressed the body and/or the mind with a particular physical response or image, then

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'constitutes' what we call pleasure and pain. The distinction between voluntary and sensitive motions, therefore, is a difference in direction and origin, not in kind […] Because volition, unlike Locke's 'reflection,' did not, for Darwin, always depend on previous sensations, it seemed to offer him and others a way of fending off the specter of man as machine, propelled from without, or as a blank page, inscribed by experience and able to reflect only upon the data provided by those inscriptions" (213-14)

over the "long distances of time" volition would begin to prompt response, image or idea from the central organs rather than peripheral ones.

What I want to underline here is that this process was understood to be, if not completely, then for the most part mechanical, since it was the product of an unwilled reaction to external stimuli, even if over time material bodies could adapt responses to internal rather than external stimuli, to the vibration of ideas rather than the vibration of objects.[41]

In a section entitled, "It is probable that muscular motion is performed in the same general manner as sensation, and the perception of ideas," Priestley offers a lengthy description of how a "single sensation" is translated into a "perceptible effect" and finally into one of the more "permanent nature" of language:

> The fingers of a young child bend upon almost every impression which is made upon the palm of the hand, thus performing the action of grasping, in the *original automatic manner*. (*a*) After a *sufficient repetition of the motions* which concur in this action, their ideas are associated strongly with other ideas, the most common of which, I suppose, are those excited by the sight of a favourite play-thing which the child uses to grasp, and hold in his

[41] In invoking this term I do not mean to involve this chapter in specific debates around materialism (or matter theory) and mechanism that were ongoing in the eighteenth century. As Steven Gaukroger's *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1680-1760* documents in fine detail, the two were often in opposition to one another and mechanistic philosophies waned as they continued to resist experimentation and promoted unified and fundamental principles, even when ultimately failed to account for certain phenomena. My primary concern here is with the broader sense in which associationism was considered to be a theory of life that made man into a machine and the foundational mechanistic relation by which it accounted for human understanding and action.

> hand […] a sufficient repetition of the proper associations, the sound of the words *grasp, take, hold, &c. the sign of the nurse's hand* in a state of contraction, the idea of a hand, and particularly of the child's own hand, in that state, and innumerable other associated circumstances […] will put the child upon grasping […] About the same time that this process is thus far advanced, the muscles of speech act occasionally [and] an articulate sound, or one approaching thereto, will sometimes be produced by this conjoint action of the muscles of the trunk, larynx, tongue and lips […] so that the child's articulate sounds will be more and more frequent every day—*his inarticulate ones will grow into disuse*.

This series of repetitions takes the form of an accumulation in which different organs, gestures, and sounds are subsumed by articulate sound and habituated motion. Association is not just achieved through repetition then, but through a translation process in which *different* sensations are organized into a grammar of articulate events—impression becomes an idea which becomes an association of ideas which becomes sound. The mouth becomes a hand, bending around the shape of sounds issued by another and learning to respond to the impression of its own ideas rather than the external pressure of a plaything. Over time physical reaction acquires the significance of a gesture as mechanistic reaction becomes a meaningful semiotics, as automatic processes become autonomous and structure is elided with gesture.

Priestley's accumulated rationality is a model of the attenuated temporality of initial impression and voluntary action for Coleridge's political Patriots. It is a

progressive and processual movement from one interval and action to the next, in which original sensation gives way to willed motion:

> that idea, or state of mind, which we may call the *will to grasp*, is generated, and sufficiently associated with the action to produce it *instantaneously*. It is therefore *perfectly voluntary* in this case; and by the innumerable repetitions of it in this perfectly voluntary state, it comes, at last, to obtain a sufficient connexion with *so many diminutive sensations, ideas, and motions as to follow them in the same manner as originally automatic actions do the corresponding sensations, and consequently to be automatic secondarily* (my emphasis 32-3)

Priestley describes the instantaneity of willed or voluntary action as, in fact, produced over long periods of time through the diminutive translation of that original, non-signifying reaction. If Priestley's narrative folds the arbitrary into the progressive motions of the voluntary, then here he also attenuates the implications of force involved in mechanical response. In other words, the movement from a first, non-signifying reaction to the signifying movement of the lips is derivative, thus making the condition of the will the depreciation of the arbitrary.[42] Voluntary action might be read here as the product of an inverted relation between automatic force and attenuated cognition. In other words,

[42] Martin Kallich makes a similar point about associationism in Hobbes' account of the imagination, or understanding more properly, writing that "it is these decaying or weak images of sense, retained in the imagination, that move together in connected trains or sequences of thought" (262).

habit is diminished reaction—a difference in quality rather than kind. And understanding is a diminished or decayed mode of physiological reaction.[43]

Such reduction in the force, or what Hume called the "vivacity," of the primary impression is again enacted by the narrative itself, in which the undertones of arbitrary grasping and infantilized seizure are domesticated by the calm of cultivation. When Priestley bypasses the unsettling arbitrariness at the origins of habituated reason, he does so not because associationist thought was entirely sealed off to its threat from within but because it presupposed the fluid incorporation of the arbitrary into articulate motion.

Associationism is immanently figurative, then, or a process of substitution in which discrete bodies and different gestures immediately give way to signification without disruption. Disparate organs—skin, hand, ear, mouth—are integrated through a repetition that is both mechanical *and* social, forming a habituated physiological unit that slowly erodes inarticulate and nonsignifying motion in favor of recognizable and conditioned motion. Priestley's engagement with this problem shows the originally automated reaction to be reinforced by the social production of language, becoming the "more permanent nature" of grasping as a sign. These series of motions are prompted by an arbitrary first instance but are dialectically progressive: "association not only converts automatic actions into voluntary, but voluntary ones into automatic" (31). Association slowly enables reactive machines to become deliberate men by naturalizing the deliberate as determined.[44]

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[43] It would be fascinating to try and think this associationist logic of language and cognition alongside debates about constitutive versus constituent power and, in particular, Walter Benjamin's distinction between mythic and divine violence in "Critique of Violence."

[44] This imbrication of individual reaction within a social accretion approximates the history of linguistics, as William Keach's review of the relation between sign and signifier as a discourse about historical contingency and determination shows. Keach traces a post-Romantic discourse of

Even so, Priestley's description of the accretion of sensation over time into a series of ideas, uses surprisingly contingent language in its provisional proposal at the outset, in which "a single sensation *can* leave a perceptible effect, trace, or vestige" and "a sufficient repetition of a sensation *may* leave a perceptible effect." So why does Priestley's account of the automatic and non-signifying nature of an originary gesture not provoke anxiety? Why does this inherent contingency at the outset, the entirely arbitrary nature of perception and learning, not produce a pause?

Daston has suggested that associationism relied on a presumed or inherent correspondence between the materiality of perceiving and thinking organs and the regularity of objective and natural processes, which secured it from the threat of the arbitrary. This mechanistic theory of life was thus protected by a generally unerring nature of its basic cognitive mechanism. In other words, association was a reliable theory of cognition and a worldview because of its probabilistic orientation towards internal and external, or subjective and objective, phenomena. It hinged largely on the positing of an inherent relation between external reality and psychological processes in which the duration and repetition of experience translated into a reliable correlation. Associationist psychologies were thus normalizing in the sense that they presupposed an inherent correspondence between the external and the internal that would regulate potential

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the arbitrariness of the sign as a defining problem for the ways that structuralist and post-structuralist linguistics has accounted for history, insofar as the notion of the arbitrary capaciously ranges from the contingent destruction of historical processes to a determinate and absolute power that sets its limits. For Keach, however, there is an alternative relation between language and history. That alternative is a kind of social linguistics of history in which no one individual and arbitrary agent or event is determining, but in which the collective production of meaning sets the condition of possibility—and in the best possible scenario creates "new, less destructive, more commonly productive forms of discourse and social life" (22). This account, however, is dependent upon a definition of language entirely as a mode of communication that I am partially trying to query here.

aberrations in perception over time. But her explanation of such psychology provides is useful in its connection between an accumulation of experience and a rational subjectivity produced by it:

> normal psychology was both inherently probabilistic and empirical in its working. Experience generated belief and probability by the repeated correlation of sensations which the mind reproduced in the association of ideas. The more constant and frequent the observed correlation, the stronger the mental association […] Hence, the objective probabilities of experience and subjective probabilities of belief were, in the well-ordered mind, mirror images of one another (197)

Such correlationism meant that there could be an equilibrium or identity assumed between the internal process of assembling ideas in the mind and the external processes of events in the world. A relative security of knowledge was ensured on the basis of accumulated knowledge and regular reflection, meaning that "one could be rational without absolute certainty" (Locke qtd. in Daston 231).

British associationist philosophers tended to downplay the significance of the arbitrary within rational, enlightened thought, then. They "had concurred that probabilities and belief not only should be, but were, proportioned to one another through the associative operations of sound minds. Although they had taken due notice of possible distortions of these operations, they had done so in the belief that these were

corrigible aberrations."[45] If this is true of associationism in general, then Coleridge becomes an outlier by making recourse to automatic action and the arbitrary mechanism of human response as a constitutive moment of, rather than "corrigible aberration" to, history.[46]

This problem and the associationist answer for it is not far from the problem of the sublime and what de Man described as the substitutional logic of the tropological. The sublime ultimately demonstrates for de Man not an overcoming of reason but of a fundamentally linguistic, which is to say substitutional, logic: "It describes not a faculty of the mind, be it as consciousness or cognition, but a potentiality inherent in language. For such a system of substitution […] generating partial totalizations within an economy of profit and loss […] is the model of discourse as tropological system" (*Aesthetic* 78). The negation faced by reason prompts the work of the imagination which is a work of both failure and achievement that allows for understanding in a limited fashion. The sublime performs a substituting operation that cannot make claims for the unity of knowledge and the world but that does enable descriptions of the world. Priestley's associationist narrative functions in much the same manner, I would argue, substituting

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[45] Stephen Gaukroger represents the period of associationism as a more intense internal debate about the inherent correspondence between rational thought and the external world. According to him the period that Daston describes as largely one of consensus was quite fraught over the unifying explanatory power of rational mechanism. His depiction is useful inasmuch as it shows eighteenth century materialist and mechanistic philosophy to be caught between different totalizing theories.

[46] In "'Uncertain Disease,'" Kevis Goodman's reading of eighteenth-century psychology and physiology indicates that the contradictions brought about by materialist philosophies were felt and often a central part of physiological treatises. Thus her reading differs from Daston, who understands 18th century psychology to be largely unconcerned with the potential for error between sensation and understanding: "the associationist psychology of Locke and his disciples had affirmed the bond between probability theory and reasonableness by linking subjective and objective aspects of probability […] Locke, Hartley, and Hume admitted that psychological pathologies sometimes disrupted the natural operations reason, but denied that these pathologies were inherent" (212).

things that are fundamentally unlike in order to produce a limited understanding of mechanistic life. Indeed, as the vitalist debates of the early nineteenth century were to show, it was precisely a circumspect and conservative understanding of the function of living bodies, versus the origin of life and consciousness, that more mechanically aligned writers would defend.

The domestic space of the nursery moves through undisrupted and progressive motions, sliding by potential discrepancies suggested by the notion of the inarticulate. What is a material process years in the making is here cued, crystallized, on a single page, offered through unhalted motions the effect a temporality of duration while actually producing what takes up the space of the instantaneous. Priestley's narrative shows the voluntary to be a habituation of the mechanical, demonstrating how instantaneous reaction endures as history, which is in turn internalized within the individual. In other words, what we watch in this scene is a dialectics of the arbitrary as it comes to be regulated by a domestic habituation given in narrative form. What picturability provided as both epistemological possibility and limit to geometry, as Gaukroger, following Peter Galison, suggests, narrative perhaps provides to associationism (248-50, 296-299).

Adam Smith's account of machines makes the enticement of such flawless association into a condition of fascination rather than reason or cognition. And his description of man's love for machines brings the seamlessness of association more directly into a political field. Indeed, what he demonstrates is the difference between machines and their effect of fascination and, by extension, between the impoverishment of life and the allure of its naturalization. Smith recognizes that machines are not important to man because of their discrete parts nor because of their useful function, but

rather because of the overall impression of systematicity and automation they give. Smith does not humanize that fascination, in the way that Clark and Khalip suggest is at work in representations of poverty. And contra Priestley, he does not take progress or history to be inherent, per se. Rather, he acknowledges that representation is the product of deception, thus separating something like impression or sensation from fascination and understanding. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith writes that it is "deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind" and the imagination's love for "the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine, or the economy" (122) upon which social order depended. Breaking apart the continuous and progressive motions of Priestley's fiction, Smith opens up a distinction between the cognitive and representational effect of a functioning machine and its mechanical parts.

Man's fascination with the "fitness" or the movement of functions, rather than the particular function itself, and his irrational love for the "perfection of the machine" provided the imaginative catalyst for "the continual motion [of] the industry of mankind" (122). Smith understands the animation of industry to be the result of seamless circulation, but does not claim that such circulation can be equated with the respective instances that comprise it. While motion moves us past the material instances of production, Smith leaves a gap open between the mechanism and the machine, the parts and the effect of the whole, which is sutured only by the appeal of a working machine.[47]

[47] Smith uses the example of a broken watch to make this point, emphasizing that it is not useful function but the appearance of functioning that makes it appealing: "A watch, in the same manner, that falls behind above two minutes in a day, is despised by one curious in watches. He sells it perhaps for a couple of guineas, and purchases another at fifty, which will not lose above a minute in a fortnight. The sole use of watches however, is to tell us what o'clock it is, and to hinder us from breaking any engagement, or suffering any other inconveniency by our ignorance

Priestley's nursery is perhaps an exemplary allegory of what Daston describes as the negligible nature of such aberrations, with its indifference towards the effect of original, arbitrary, and non-signifying gestures as persistent errors of association. Instead the hand of the nurse stands in metonymically for a self-correcting accumulation of signifying history—or the history that ensures the propriety of associations, however arbitrary they begin. Nonetheless, reading Priestley and Coleridge together shows the shadow of what Keach calls "the material and political frames of reference" of arbitrary power, which was distributed across linguistic, historical and political registers in Enlightenment and Romantic texts. Priestley's fiction, Smith's machine, and Coleridge's multitudes are all part of what Keach describes as the historical and social dialectic in "which what is initially random and contingent becomes absolute"—or if not absolute than, in Priestley's words, "more frequent every day."

History becomes a repository of the arbitrary, of which Priestley's nursery is one mise-en-scene of social construction that organizes and incorporates it. Through the substitutions of narrative, history appears as habit, beyond individual agency but not pre-determined by an outside or absolute power. In its socialized form the arbitrary is safeguarded as its inarticulate and senseless gestures give way, to the articulate and meaningful. In Priestley's narrative, while the mechanical impulse of the child's grasp may be entirely arbitrary its progressive development is secured by the fiction of nursery and the history of signification borne by the association between the words "grasp, take,

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in that particular point. But the person so nice with regard to this machine, will not always be found either more scrupulously punctual than other men, or more anxiously concerned upon any other account, to know precisely what time of day it is. What interests him is not so much the attainment of this piece of knowledge, as the perfection of the machine which serves to attain it" (119).

hold" with the "original automatic action." That narrative fiction reveals something more than Daston's suggestion that associationism was secured by a belief in an inherent principle. Such psychology was reproduced through the fiction of narrative, in which contingency is staged in a setting that is as necessary as bodily organs themselves. This is why Coleridge's inclusion of the arbitrary and non-signifying gesture within associationist, and his collapsing of it within revolutionary time, seems so extraordinary.

According to Daston, once the dust settled on the French Revolution the once-benign aberrations of rational, enlightened thought acquired an entirely new and potentially systematic power. What had been assumed as an inherent or categorical correspondence between external stimuli and the results of internal reflection no longer held. Daston argues that once the Revolution crashed down on the inherence of that assumption, more quantitative and mathematical methodologies came to fill the gap in intellectual and theoretical hegemony. For Daston, Condillac was the one to articulate the unsustainability of the associationist view of the world at the close of the eighteenth century. Unlike Hume, Locke and others, Condillac "claimed that at least one source of error in the intuitive weighing of probabilities, *the pressure of needs and interests*, was as natural as balancing frequencies of past events, and *that illusions perpetuated by imagination* were almost as common" (my emphasis 210).[48]

[48] Georgiana Green has described the formation of popular sovereignty in the nineteenth century as an "exclusive preoccupation with satisfying the need for bare necessities" (10). According to her, the ambivalence of the structure of constituent power has to do with this incorporation of the state of nature within the structure of sovereignty, not as "the power of command" but as "the power to form governments" (7). This negotiation leaves entirely to the side, however, what I have presented as the allegorical function of the state of nature within the construction of nineteenth century history. The problem of this equation between bare life of popular sovereignty is that it attends only to a dialectic between the historical and the state of nature without considering how the latter is already narrativized within the former. Perhaps a simpler way to say

We only need look at the diagnosis shared in assessments of both madness and rioting to see that they share the threat of aberrations to regulated association. Both conditions were understood to originate from a similar state of dissociation. In the case of psychology, for instance, Thomas Arnold wrote in 1782 that madness was the product of "increased activity in…quick transitions… give rise to ideas in such order and succession that they appear to have little or no proper connection" (Arnold 81). The riot is a species of such dissociation--understood in French, Italian, or English riot refers etymologically to an internal state, as an emotion, as pleasure, as inner turmoil. But the problem of the riot is always that the intemperance of an internal condition might not remain simply a matter of the mind. Riots thus create an external world in the image of improper internal associations. The *Political Magazine* has the Gordon Riots of 1780 the product of "arbitrary associations" and "internal commotion" prompted by "intemperate language" and George Craik's 1837 survey of English riots diagnoses them as the product of "the inflaming and stirring up" of "the thoughtless multitudes […] but for their excitement, never would have been ventured upon." As opposed to individual madness, then, in riots what is felt as an internal condition quickly sparks external flames. The *Political Magazine* highlights this condition of disconnected succession in both city and mind directly, writing that the 1780 Gordon Riots "impressed the mind of the *spectator with an idea*, as if not only the whole metropolis was burning, but all nations yielding to *the final consummation of things*" ("Account" 44). What Arnold describes as a psychological state of "succession without connection" and "ideas in quick transition" was a condition that could move outside the mind and onto the streets. Impulsive emotions and inflamed

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this is that it understands the notion of life, vis-à-vis bare necessities, as always already a matter of sovereignty.

motions conjure not just an unstable mind or agitated thoughts, but as Craik describes it, "a breaking apart of the whole machine [of society]." The problem of the riot, like madness, is a problem in which motions remain disassociated and nonsignifying, stalled in the instance of impulse. Madness and riots ran together as a stutter, even a tautology, in movement. They suggest a piling up of instantaneous and disconnected impressions akin to what Celeste Langan has called a "miserly" rhetoric of repetition that yields no communicative or symbolic value, rather than an associationist connection between internal and external states that yields articulate understanding.

IV. Romantic Riots: The Political Economy of Apostrophe

In this closing section I move from Coleridge's lectures into a consideration of eighteenth-century political economy to suggest that a principle of equilibrium that we saw in associationism reemerges in theories of surplus populations. I want to use this principle as a dialectical other to the impulsive, reactionary bodies we saw above, in order to argue that it is necessary to go beyond frameworks of rationality and irrationality, consciousness and spontaneity, humanism and the nonhuman in our revisitations of Romantic collectives.

Instead, I turn to a consideration of, in de Man's words, "the passage from trope to performative" (*Aesthetic* 133) within the structuring of biological life, in a move from the associative to the riotous. If trope sustains an economic understanding of life as a perfect machine, then the passage to performative introduces contingency within its reproduction. Political economy of the eighteenth century reduced material life to

something like the structure of cognition or understanding, ultimately excluding materialist conditions from its equations.[49] But a rhetorical reading of that transformation suggest that the institution of material life as a matter of equilibrium passes through the performative, thus involving it not only in violence but also a struggle over the legitimacy of that transformation.

If a medical and physiological language was at once being used to understand why material bodies failed to properly associate, then political economy was on its way to abstracting a physio-psychological principle into one of population and reproduction. Edmund Burke's letter to William Pitt on the subject of the 1795 food crisis, the same one during which Coleridge delivered his lectures, articulates the translation between an associationist worldview and classical economics that I want to focus on here. In his letter, Burke advises Pitt against governmental subsidies to agricultural workers for the following reason: "The laboring people are only poor, because they are numerous. Numbers *in their nature* imply poverty. In a fair distribution among a vast multitude, none can have much" (61-2).[50] Burke was not the only one to translate the balancing act of associationism to a theory of populations when it came to assessing riots. George Craik also prefaced his history of English riots, *Tumults of Political Excitement*, with a

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[49] I say ultimate because, as Catherin Gallagher makes clear, Romantic-era political economy was quite concerned with the material limits of physical bodies, and the expenditure of their vitality. Nonetheless, as she too argues, at some level such concerns were eclipsed in the translation of vitality into the matter of exchange and the abstract equivalence through which it assessed profits.

[50] Burke's economic policies were in general entirely aligned with the free market and classical economy's belief in the natural equilibrium it would establish. The literary executors of his estate wrote in their preface to his "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity" that Adam Smith had consulted him "in the progress of the celebrated work on the Wealth of Nations" (53). For this reasons he advocated strongly for the practice of forestalling by which agricultural products could be privately purchased in large quantities before arriving at the market for either domestic or commercial purchase. This practice led to higher costs for basic goods as well as the development of speculative markets around them. E.P. Thompson's The Moral Economy of the Crowd" details the longterm impacts of forestalling on increasing cost of living and decreasing value of wages.

natural law of populations that naturalized the surplus of poverty: "these divisions [between classes] be it remembered, are not so many separate orders established by the law […] but are in reality *the institution of nature herself*, in every society under every form of government" (100). Burke and Craik both assert a principle of an underlying and regulating proportion between natural phenomenon and enlightened understanding into politics. This principle of a naturally inhering proportionality is visible also in Burke and Craik's shared claims about the naturally hierarchical distribution of wealth that is created by the constraints of scarcity. The structuring worldview of associationism, which regulated the translation of sensation into rational ideas in proportion with the regular motions of the natural world, becomes visible here as a principle of populations in which a surplus number of the poor is naturally proportionate. Poverty thus became a principle of equilibrium. And what association took as a theory of cognition that suffered deviation, political economy came to understand as a natural law.

What is fascinating about this position is that it asserts an inherent balance of surplus bodies—which was equated with a balance in nature—that was the product of imminently recent transformations before and around the time Burke was writing. As Wally Seccombe has argued, this transformation happened within the sphere of reproduction, the same sphere that Coleridge is essentially referring to when he describes the impulsive gestures of the poor. Seccombe presents the eighteenth century as era in which "surplus extraction [was separated] from the site of domestic reproduction" (14). This separation was not only a matter of transforming labor into wage labor but of laborers into a population that was dependent, in gendered ways, upon capitalist production for their own reproduction. In other words, the eighteenth century saw a

revolution in terms of how the historical pressure of material needs within met by the labor system.[51] What made this transition possible was, in part, a massive growth in population that industrializing capitalism harnessed:

> In many respects the real miracle of the Industrial Revolution occurred in the countryside […] agricultural production rose sufficiently to permit a massive reduction of the proportion of the total labour force active in food production [just as] rural zones generated a prolific excess of births over deaths [creating] a seemingly inexhaustible pool of dispossessed labourers who flooded the cities in their millions, seeking jobs, marriage partners and housing (22)

This spike in population, along with the long process of enclosure and the demise of feudalism, meant that modes of reproduction, which had previously been considered as a cost of labor within feudal production, no longer had to be assumed by capitalists and that instead came to be *divided and concealed* in the wage-form.[52]

What I am interested in is how this process of division and concealment, or the rise of the wage, relied on a similar logic of inherent equilibrium that we see in association. That is, I want to propose a dialectic of sorts between associationist treatment

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[51] Picchio writes that "The waged labour market required control over labour and its reproduction, and thus was gained through two different and interrelated historical processes. One of these, the expropriation of the means of subsistence which forced the independent household into the labour market" through "enclosures and primitive accumulation" and the other as the increased "control over the process of reproduction of the laboring population" (10).

[52] Picchio writes that "The separation between the processes of production and reproduction hides the ways in which the proportion between the value of production and costs of reproduction has historically been held within the limits compatible with capitalist accumulation But what is compatible is actually dictated by the rate of profit—by definition historical—and not by natural scarcities or technological dynamics" (6).

of material need as an aberration, both individual and collective, to a normative physio-psychology and an emergent theorization of population that began to understand such aberrations as short-term interruptions to the natural balance of the market, thus rendering what appeared as the demands of such need a secondary and unrelated concern. According to Antonella Picchio, political economists after Smith and Ricardo came to understand the fluctuations in the living conditions of populations as "a natural or 'objective' limit on the resources available for the working population" rather than as "given in time and space, by habits, social contract, and historical power relationships" (Picchio 31). Smith and Ricardo had understood that the demands of material life were a contingent factor that affected the profits of capital over time. But in her account, eighteenth century economic theorists converted reproduction from a material, dynamic and historical process into a set of natural laws found on a Malthusian landscape of objective scarcity. They did so by representing reproductive costs as a wage, thus converting what she calls an exogenous or external factor into one internally regulated by the market.

Picchio argues that this was a crucial transition in the history of classical political economy inasmuch as it made the reproduction of labor an objective matter of the market rather than a contingent cost that is "necessarily material and social" and exerts itself as the force of "historical modes of production […], class power relationships, habits and tastes" (13).[53] Second generation political economists naturalized those demands by

[53] Burke clearly shows himself to be an adherent to this version of free market economics when he writes in "Thoughts" that "The rate of wages in truth has no *direct* relation to [the price of provisions]. Labour is a commodity like every other, and rises or falls according to the demand. This is in the nature of things; however, the nature of things has provided for their necessities" (64).

assuming a natural limit on resources that would be distributed through supply and demand.[54] To go back to the language I used earlier, political economy treated the reproduction of populations as a motion not of individual bodies but of invisible principles. It is for this reason that Burke advocated against subsidized relief for workers because, "laws prescribing […] a very stiff, and often inapplicable rule […] *never* can provide the just proportions between earning and salary on the one hand, and nutriment on the other: whereas interest, habit, and the tacit convention that arise from a thousand nameless circumstances, produces a *tact* that regulates without difficulty" (71). Patterned on Smith's principle of the "invisible hand," Burke here makes reproduction into a perfected or self-regulating machine, one in which discrete instances of market failure can be overlooked in favor of the fascination of its abstracted operations.

The poverty of surplus population came to be understood precisely not as a historical condition but as a natural motion, not a potential force of impulsive disruption but an exemplar of equilibrium. At around the same time that Thompson describes the undoing of an "equilibrium" of power within struggles over reproduction, political economists began imputing an equilibrium to reproduction in which there literally was no struggle to be had over who got what. In other words, what I began by describing as a transitional moment of 1795, a moment fraught with the contingencies that Coleridge figures as physiological impulse, became a self-regulating machine of population. What I am suggesting here is that a rhetoric of equilibrium facilitated an erasure of temporality

[54] Picchio distinguishes Malthus' perspective, which Burke seems to accept, from previous eighteenth century social theorists whom she argues "for the most part considered the increase of population not only as a symptom but also as a cause of the increase of wealth; some of them considered the population itself as an asset" (24).

within political economy that was indexed, if only negatively, by the reactions of impulsive bodies. Displacing what we saw earlier as the seamless operation of association in the individual body, political economy created an ideology of atemporal, automated motions of reproduction.

But this displacement was, importantly, an articulation or even a signature of a kind in the sense that Agamben has described it: "Signatures move and displace concepts and signs from one field to another" (*Kingdom* 4). Political economy did not exclude the material life from its account of reproduction, or so I am suggesting. Instead, it arranged life into a new relation to labor. That arrangement was one of *coincidence* both in that it was treated as "a notable occurrence of events…having no apparent causal connection" but also in that life came to occupy "the same place or part of space" as the market. Material life was made into an indirect concern of labor as labor-as-commodity came to be the producer of life: "The impossibility of the subsistence of a man, who carries his labour to a market, is totally beside the question […] The only question is, what is it worth to the buyer? (69) Burke's description of subsistence as a matter unrelated to the commodification of labor is a tropological configuration of life, which appears in a mode of apostrophic indirection later in Marx: "the worker is often compelled to make his individual consumption into a merely *incidental* part of the production process […] he provides himself with means of subsistence in order to keep his labour-power in motion, just as coal and water are supplied to the steam-engine, and oil to the wheel" (717).

Because I will soon turn to apostrophe, I just want to underline that this articulation or "signature" of life functions explicitly like that rhetorical trope in a specific sense. Apostrophe, as Sara Guyer defines it, is a "direct address [that] is *indirect*,

a deviation from convention. Here direct and indirect are not merely opposites: they *coincide* with, rather than *exclude*, one another. Apostrophe is a direct address—an address 'to'; however, its direction is a mode of indirection within speech. It is a trope of direct speech as a turn away from direct (or 'straight') speech" (146). Guyer's definition of apostrophe here reminds us that the dialectics through which I have just tracked life's transformation into a secondary position to capitalist profits was a process of configuring relations rather than distinctions, a process of spatial and temporal turns rather than any direct culmination. Apostrophe's sleight of speech helps us to see what I described above as the concealment of the wage form as a circuitous arrangement of relations rather than as a linear movement or a total division. This figure of speech thus tropes not only a condition of poetic voice, but a transition in which previous distinctions between productive and reproductive time were collapsed into the (re)productive circuit of surplus value: "every social mode of production is simultaneously a mode of reproduction" (Marx). This simultaneity is not the same thing as the operation of Smith's perfect machine, however. We should read it instead as the coordination that Marxists would call reproduction's formal subsumption under production and wage labor but also a correlation of space and time that would become open to struggle in new ways. Thus under capitalist wage labor reproduction becomes *extraneous and integral* to production and the "disjunction" of reproduction from production was simultaneous, in a fracturing and contested sense.[55]

One begins to wonder if this structure of indirection had anything to do with the oscillating representations of Romantic riots as the product of both arbitrary action and

[55] This claim begins to hint, intentionally, at the struggle over the wage that at least up until the 1960s could still be theorized as a kind of absolute limit to capitalism.

intention. Such conflicting accounts are available in *The Political Magazine's* assessment of the Gordon Riots as a product of both unthinking reaction and clandestine planning. One way to understand this contradictory treatment of Romantic riots might be through the apostrophic structure I have outlined above, in a dialectic in which life is entirely central to and yet excluded from reproduction, in which it is everything and nothing all at once. Life, in other words, is put into a structure of coincidence that manifests the contradictions of that term as what is both inconsequential and what is an event.[56]

V. Apostrophe and Machine Breaking

I have already alluded to the rhetorical structure of life as it was transformed by capitalism in the eighteenth century. Now I want to turn more directly to a consideration of how apostrophe figures that transformation differently than the impulsive or the associationist machines we have seen above. Instead, apostrophe tropes the material conditions of 1795 as a paradoxical condition of surplus and superfluity, tracing contradictions where we have thus far seen only equilibrium. In order to think more carefully about what this traditionally lyrical trope can tell us about the materialist condition of life in the eighteenth century we must go back to the lectures. Or, rather, we must go back to what prefaces the lectures which, as Derrida reminds us, acts as a

[56] In this sense, thinking rhetorically helps to anticipate Joshua Clover has recently suggested that the riot is the political eruption in the sphere of reproduction that is enacted by surplus populations who have been barred from wage labor and the sphere of production. In his articulation the separation between such spheres is crucial for understanding the particular form that political action takes at a given time. But for my purposes what is interesting is to think how the fiction of life or reproduction as something that could be equated with pure circulation, exchange, or the equilibrium of the market is what is in question here. That is, it seems worth considering how such an equation operates to stratify spheres of life and spheres of value and the historical production of such an equation through economic discourse of the eighteenth century.

persistent externality or outside to the system—or associations in this case—that follows it, a remainder to its dialectics of inside and outside.[57]

Numerous prefaces launch what I have described above as the references to associationism and economy in Coleridge's lectures. Indeed, it is almost inconceivable to have begun with external references rather than with such prefacing. By the time Coleridge published the printed lectures they had four prefaces to the main lecture that entitled "On the Present War." Those prefatory statements include an epigraph from Aristophanes; a Preface invoking the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes; "A Letter From Liberty to Her Dear Friend Famine" and the "Introductory Address."[58] "A Letter From Liberty to Her Dear Friend Famine" is, as the title suggests, allegorical, ironic, and simply put, bizarre. It may be the only case in English literature when Famine functions as the subject of address.

In a strictly rhetorical sense, the "Letter to Famine" allegorizes of the failure of direct speech to achieve peace and prevent war. But the "Letter" is not just allegory or direct address, as the "Introductory Address" later will be. In that latter section we saw that Coleridge explicitly deploys indirection within his direct address to Patriots, calling attention to language's tendency to turn away in the face of what it cannot apprehend. Similarly, most of Liberty's letter is structured by turns away from addresses to audiences that end up being mistaken or absent. In an allegory befitting of Shelley's later "Mask of Anarchy," Liberty petitions Religion and Prudence to appeal to "Majesty" only to realize that they have been replaced by imposters. Next she appeals to Conscience, who is

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[57] See Derrida's "Outwork: Extratext, foreplay, bookend, facing, prefacing," *Dissemination*.
[58] The epigraph reads, satirically, "So here I'm waiting, thoroughly prepared/To riot, wrangle, interrupt the speakers/Whene'er they speak of anything but Peace" (Patton and Mann n. 1 26).

described as a "perfect ventriloquist who could throw her voice into any place she liked", but Liberty finds that such ventriloquism is "seldom attended to." The Letter, like the Address that follows, demonstrates the dizzying series of turns to some other person that trope the absence that conditions address itself. It is a field marked by confusion.

But apostrophe works slightly differently in the manner I've already suggested through Guyer. It is a field marked by arrested time. It is not a rhetorical management of what one does not know as in the case of Coleridge's turn away from the poor or the circuitous confusions of Liberty above. Rather, apostrophe's coincidence of direction and indirection signals a turn of force or an appeal to a force that is not the sovereign or the judge. In Quintilian's definition it is "'a diversion of our words to address some person other than the judge'" (qtd. in Culler 59). Apostrophe perhaps connotes coincidence as the bringing together of direct and indirect speech in an arrested instance, in a moment when contradictions explode by "occurring at the same time and occupying the same space of time" ("Coincidence"). It is only at the end of the letter that we can begin to see this difference, when apostrophe shifts from a trope of turns to call Famine: "O Famine, most eloquent Goddess! Plead my cause. I meantime will pray fervently that Heaven may unseal the ears of its viceregents, so that they may listen to your first pleadings, while yet *your voice is faint and distant*, and your counsels peaceable" (31).

In this concluding gesture we might be tempted to hear an appeal to an equilibrium of Famine and Plenty, lack and surplus. But there is also the textual mark of something left over in this particular trope, made most visible in the apostrophic "O!". Apostrophe's defining trait is this mark of linguistic superfluity that never fully balances. Such speech marks out the failure of erasure or subsumption into association's articulate

progression. If association gives the semblance of a body and speech united, then apostrophe tends, to invoke Johnson's word, to "dismember" such associations between mouth and sound. And Coleridge's allegorical treatment of Famine reminds us even more of this dissociating effect-- apostrophic in its etymology, Famine signifies not just hunger and starvation but also "to vanish" and "to split open." Famine allegorizes the effects of apostrophe, as it separates the word from proper succession, calling attention to the time in between, what Agamben has called the time that remains. In other words, apostrophe is an impulsive speech that institutes a gap between the materiality of language and the motion of understanding. Contrary to Coleridge's own pleas against the impulsive action of the poor, the effects of this letter are an irreducible instantaneity or what Jonathan Culler has described as a "saying of the now." If Coleridge tries to avoid associating himself with riots through indirect address, then his apostrophe shares their rhetorical time.

Barbara Johnson and Paul de Man both suggest that apostrophe is almost synonymous with lyric poetry. But apostrophe frequently tropes the division of time between oration and revolution. For instance, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri name their short text on the global uprisings of 2011 *Declaration*, itself a form of apostrophe that remains less secure of the future than does the manifesto. And in *Communal Luxury*, Kristin Ross' history of the Paris Commune, begins with an apostrophe uttered two years in advance at a workers' gathering, and with journeyman Louis Alfred Briosne's "direct second-person address" to his audience as "Citoyennes et citoyens" rather than "Mesdames et messieurs." Ross begins with this apostrophic moment to call attention to the necessary division between the saying of the now and the probability of the future,

writing that apostrophe "[creates] that gap or division in the now, in the contemporary moment constituted by the speech act" which "interpellates listeners to be part of that present" (17). As Ross suggests, apostrophe posits a gap in motion that a more economical time would foreclose, a time that enables "an understanding of the present, in its unfolding, as historical, as changing" (16).

In apostrophizing Famine, Coleridge conjoins material conditions with such an undetermined "presence of the now" (Benjamin 261). In other words, he introduces the very thing that population made superfluous and coincidental—life itself—as a predicament of temporal contingency. If apostrophe is both the mark of superfluity and a saying of the now, then what I am arguing here is that Coleridge effectively tropes the historical condition of the riot in 1795. What is made superfluous seizes transformation of space and time, the division within reproduction, away from the fiction of its perfection. It is important that Coleridge addresses Famine here rather than indirectly referencing the Oppressed. Famine is specifically not a reference to Malthusian determinacy or a spasmodic body, or a figure of deprivation masked as a body. It is an allegory of the conditions through which bodies came to be represented as such. It is a figure for the historical process that rendered life superfluous, as a surplus population, and in so doing effected a time opened up to struggle. Addressing Famine opens the material conditions of reproduction in the eighteenth century up to the possibility of arrested succession and the dissociation of time. In this coincidence we are not asked to understand, sympathize with, or humanize poverty but to see in the production of its conditions a force. In apostrophe Coleridge gives us "the emergence of a language of power out of a language of cognition" (de Man *Aesthetic* 133).

Coleridge's strange apostrophic allegory is the materialist moment of this text, one in which life is not economizing but divisive. Famine's superfluity—marked in the letter O!—is a trace of historical contingency in 1795, not a representation of reactive bodies nor of the equilibrium of population. This letter tropes the contradiction of life as it both exceeds and becomes exceedingly superfluous, in a condition that preconditions mechanization but also threatens, in Craik's words, the "breaking apart of the whole machine [of society]." Apostrophe's non-signifying mark, its embarrassing excess of meaning, figures something indeterminate in the mechanism of life. It marks a remainder that does not "go," as Adorno might say, entirely into the category of production, at least not strictly in the abstract sense of political economy. Coleridge's plea to Famine reminds us of slow violence of life's destruction and reconstruction as a surplus population. But it also draws out a different kind of destruction, that of any determination by capital or the political consciousness. This other deconstruction is what I am trying to get at in insisting on the apostrophic nature of transitions in 1795, a time of seizing the time of equilibrium that enables the probability of the future, whether it be progressive, as the associationists thought, or impoverished, as political economy had it. Coleridge's letter to Famine participates in a genre of "the scores of letters" that appeared, often unsigned and nailed to trees and left in squares, all over England between 1795 and 1801. These letters linked cries for bread with the end of monarchy, thus making a crisis in reproduction a crisis in sovereignty, written in the riotous style of succession with "little to no proper connection." Such addresses were not appeals to reason and understanding, but traces of motions and economies disrupted. Coleridge's Letter, I suggest, is of this the genre of a letter that appeals not to minds susceptible of reasoning, but of a letter that more like the

materiality of the letter that David Clark and Tillotama Rajan call the "insignificant, in-determining opening of signification." Can the letter of apostrophe—its O!—be read through regulated motions, or is it more a mark of the fits and starts, the spasmodic moment, of the historical? If so, then I suggest that we should consider Coleridge's call to Famine as a machine breaking of a rhetorical kind, prefacing not only his lectures but perhaps also the Luddite smashing of frames.

Apostrophe is a life machine. But it is not a seamless or perfected one. The life apostrophe animates is a halted machine, stalled in almost-ekphrastic appearance of linguistic parts rather than a movement of a living organism. As a trope that is always quasi-catachrestic, animating through deanimation, apostrophe finds life as always already mechanical in its evacuation of the automatic equibrilations we saw above. This is a moment of twilight and daybreak for such machinery:

> We are coming to the end of one tradition, and the new tradition has scarcely emerged. In these years (1800-1) the alternative form of economic pressure—pressure upon wages—is becoming more vigorous; there is also something more than rhetoric behind the language of sedition […] in the new territories of the industrial revolution [action] passes by stages into other forms of action (Thompson 359)

We are, in other words, between an age of mechanism and mechanization, the movement between the poor and the mass worker. Here the momentary mechanical grasp of associationism becomes a figure for political economy, in which "discrete instances and

processes of labor are snatched away from the grasp of human reason […] Snatched away at the same time is any possible rational decision or calculation regarding capital's historical development" (Bajorek 65).

Coleridge's Letter thus perhaps suggests why rumors that he was instigating insurrection circulated after the lectures. Such rumors remind us that Coleridge's own youthly inclinations were, against his own intentions, quite riotous. As John Thelwall put it in 1795, Coleridge was a "young man of brilliant understanding […] desperate fortune, democratick principles, and entirely led away by the feelings of the moment" (qtd. in Patton and Mann xxix.) To this extent, Coleridge's personal tendencies frame the characterization of the riot that E.P. Thompson was trying to put to rest in his famous essay on the food riot, "The Moral Economy of the Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," one in which actions were "compulsive, rather than self-conscious or self-activating" (316). Thompson sought to restore to the riot a sense of logic and intentionality where it had previously been characterized as spontaneous and reactive. But then the riot shares a condition with more than just Coleridge; indeed, it shares in a long history of critical assessments of Romantic poetry. Both the riot and Romanticism are caught interpretively somewhere between the language I invoked in the introduction of this chapter, a language of "conscious action and volition" and a language "beyond…control and comprehension" (Balfour). Rather than do away with the rhetorical materialism shared between Romanticism and the riot, I have here tried to consider that the compulsive may be a repressed index of the contingent, that the conscious may be a way of avoiding the precarity of the future.

With apostrophe, there is an instantiation in the now of the Romantic riot, perhaps suggesting why it is so difficult to assimilate it within history. This now-ness or immediacy, the performative quality of the Romantic riot, figured by the mechanistic reaction or response in which there seems to be no time for mediation, in a moment of vivacious impression or original reaction that might end everything. If associationism tends to give us either an Enlightenment view of progress or a bourgeois materialism, then it also takes within it an "original action" that is constitutive in the most political sense—arbitrary, non-signifying and destructive to the domesticated associations that came before it. In this sense, the Romantic riot might be the political form of what Ian Balfour has called the Romantic rhetoric of prophecy, a time divided between the immediate and the mediated, between the performative and the interpretive. As Balfour argues, what makes prophecy distinctive in the Romantic period is the insecure relation between utterance and effect, and thus its difference from normative or teleological temporalities. Romantic prophecy produces enigmatic and illegible scenes that are divided between prophecy and event and in which apocalypse may never come to pass, thus displaying "the possible discrepancies between the content and the effect of prophetic rhetoric" (25).

The riotous life of Romanticism thus prefigures the crucial paradox of collective life today then, *that it feels at once determinately futile and entirely contingent*. Paul de Man once compared poetry to this paradox of the determinately contingent, writing that it shows us a "random event whose power, *like* the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence." That this occurrence might be a place for finding figures of life, rather than death, is the demand we face today. Indeed, it seems we cannot but

think this paradox in its inverted form, as we are surrounded by figures of life living through extreme precarity. Living constantly at the end of things—namely of economic upheaval and climactic crisis—we must find ways to invert the relation between contingency and death that de Man would both propose in their different ways. My turn to the riotous, to the riot, as a figure of life in 1795 is an attempt to rethink that relation in the light of today, an attempt to see in the destruction of abstraction, in the disruption of thought's tendency towards equilibrium, an address to the present.

""Forms of Living Death": Mockery, Marronage, and Sovereignty in Percy Shelley and John Gareth Stedman

Prior to John Gareth Stedman's arrival on the Dutch slave colony of Surinam, where he acquired the experiences later documented in his *Narrative of a five years' Expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam*, the "First Boni-Maroon War" between Dutch colonists and escaped slave maroons had concluded.[59] That first and subsequent war exacted heavy tolls on the Dutch, who were continuously on the outlook for maroons who "escaped into the rain forest that grew almost up to the doorsteps of the plantations" and had launched continuous attacks against plantations and the imperial colonists (Price xii). It was only with the help of conscripted Surinamese slave-soldiers that the Dutch army finally discovered the main rebel holdout in 1772. This discovery was said to precipitate the end of the first part of the First War, and thus would seem to be a somber event for self-emancipated slaves. Nonetheless, it was later said "that those fleeing the village 'taunted their attackers, 'shout[ing] out to us that their old village

[59] Surinam became a Dutch colony in the mid-seventeenth century. The First Boni War began in 1768/9. The second half, in which Stedman served, began in 1773. Both were fought between escaped slaves on the island of Surinam and the colonial Dutch forces. The wars erupted in part because the Dutch frequently neglected their agreement to recognize the freedom of escaped slaves who fought the Dutch for it, and because other slaves were consistently attempting to escape and do the same. Stedman's own *Narrative* was published in 1796, roughly thirty years after his time as a captain in Surinam from 1773-1777. His *Narrative* was hugely influential on the romantic generation that preceded Percy Shelley's. Joseph Johnson published a heavily edited and modified version of the text, which was accompanied by sixteen engravings by William Blake. See Richard Price and Sally Price, "Introduction."*Stedman's Surinam: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Slave Society, An Abridged, Modernized Edition of Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam by John Gareth Stedman*. All references to Stedman below come from Price and Price. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker also discuss the impact of slave rebellion and marronage in the colonies alongside Stedman's *Narrative* and Blake's prints in the *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*.

[Boucou] was [now] called ‘Mi Sal Lossij’ [I may be taken] but their new one was ‘Jou no sal vindij’ [You will not find it]” (xxi).

I begin with this act of mockery, one similarly repeated throughout Stedman’s *Narrative* as he describes the hunt for slave maroons, because it is exceptional within the longer eighteenth and nineteenth century record of slave narratives. Here, the rebels’ mockery of colonial forces ironically promises a future in the very moment of flight, turning the event of imperial victory on its head. This humorous moment seems extraordinary, even uncomfortable, because it does not fit within the tropes we have come to associate with the liberal political notion of freedom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[60] Rather than asserting an instance of recognition or identification, in the passage above the rhetorical address to the “You,” issued by the speaking “I,” is effaced. The “I” is not self-possessed; it has been taken. The terms of recognition by the “You” of the addressee, or even sympathetic substitution, does not appear as the condition on which the future hinges. Instead, that “You” is equated with an absence of knowledge, “[You will not find it].” Only a vague and a-subjective “it” remains as the condition of possible freedom that evades the rhetorical structure of subjectivity, the I/You dichotomy. The “I” and the “You” both seem lost, but an unknown “it” escapes as the promise of a continued revolt. It is hard to know, as Sara Guyer’s work has suggested,

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[60] Scholars of romanticism have given us good reason to challenge such notions of freedom. For instance, Paul Youngquist has argued that liberal political theory’s affirmation of “universal human rights” was established through, rather than against, the practice of slavery and, later, scientific narratives that supported racism. *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism.*. See also Saree Makdisi’s distinction between radical and liberal political thought in “Blake's metropolitan radicalism,” *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene in British Romanticism, 1780-1840*. For an account of the hegemony of Enlightenment narratives of freedom as a revolutionary ideal within a colonial and postcolonial context, see David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of the Colonial Enlightenment*.

what survives or lives on in such acts of apostrophe.[61] But it is precisely this *it*, a fundamentally unrecognizable figure of life, that evades identification with a politics of sovereignty.

Here I argue for mockery as a kind of trope by which to read a related phenomenon in Stedman's *Narrative* and Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Sensitive Plant." This trope asks us to consider the decay of anthropomorphic life as a death beyond the grip of sovereignty. Giorgio Agamben's recently concluded *Homo Sacer* series has exhaustively recounted the singular hold that sovereignty has over bare life. But Shelley's notion of mockery unsettles, even ridicules, any given relation between life and death. Mockery, as Percy Shelley uses it in his "The Sensitive Plant," upsets distinctions between the living and the dead, between human and nonhuman life forms. Shelley can help us to understand how slave marronage resists the conflation of revolution with sovereignty during the romantic period. Read through Shelley's use of mockery, Stedman's description of marronage becomes a political practice that suspends distinctions between the form of life we tend to identify with politics, the human, and that which we tend to identify with nature, the nonhuman—and thus also the form that politics takes. I read Shelley and Stedman alongside each other in order to understand how their texts disfigure anthropomorphosis and give way to a radical configuration of terrain and human bodies, the configuration of marronage that we can begin to see above as slaves "escaped into the rainforest." In doing so, I aim to provoke a line of inquiry into

[61] See "The Viability of Poetry," *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism* and "Naked Language, Naked Life: Wordsworth's Rhetoric of Survival," *Romanticism After Auschwitz*.

our notion of a revolutionary romanticism that emerges through the disfiguration, or mockery, of the human rather than with an affirmation of it as a political form.[62]

Mockery of the kind we have briefly seen above, and that I will treat as an operative trope by which to read Shelley's poem and Stedman's account of slave marronage, provides an unstable ground for sovereignty. Like irony, mockery accomplishes that cutting effect of *witz*, which reduces human knowledge to a useless, if not ridiculous, thing.[63] But as its etymology suggests, mockery is also moderately generative. It imitates and counterfeits, pulling the rug out from under the real and releasing us to laugh at what we had taken for granted. The anecdote with which I began opens up this work of mockery, gesturing to another place of resistance that will be constructed in the gap between the quintessential terms of recognition, the I and the You: "I" may be found, but "You" will not find "it."

Part I. Mockery and Materiality

"The Sensitive Plant," written in spring 1820 and published in the *Prometheus Unbound* collection later that year, is one of Shelley's stranger and less frequently taught poems. Written in a slightly modified ballad form, it is structured by four narrative

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[62] The possible texts to name in defining such a romanticism would be impossible. But for the purposes of this essay, see discussions of revolution and romanticism offered in *Revolution Against the Tide of Modernity,* Michael Lowy and Robert Sayre; *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt; *Political Romanticism*, Carl Schmitt; *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity*, Saree Makdisi.

[63] On the effect of witz on human knowledge, see Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*; "The Rhetoric of Temporality", Paul de Man; and "The Concept of Irony", *Aesthetic Ideology*.

stanzas and a concluding philosophical stanza that I discuss first. That stanza ends with this nod to what Shelley calls "mockery":

> I dare not guess; but in this life
> Of error, ignorance, and strife—
> Where nothing is but all things seem,
> And we, the shadows of the dream,
>
> It is a modest creed, and yet
> Pleasant if one considers it,
> To own that death itself might be,
> Like all the rest,—a mockery.[64]

Much of my later reading of colonialism and marronage will hinge on how this "trope" of mockery works in Shelley's poem, so I want to spend adequate time parsing its implications here.

The figure of mockery introduces a related problematic within Romanticism, one traditionally associated with lyricism. This is the invocation of voice through figures of speech, in which presence is simulated, effected or "mocked" through figures that mark the absence of speech. As Marc Redfield has noted, Shelley's most famous ballad, "The Mask of Anarchy" also stages a simulation of speech. Shelley's textually referential staging of oratory and speech exemplifies "a certain loss or scattering of the self" more

[64] Percy Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat.

than it does "the presence and presence-to-self of an orator" (156, 157). Redfield's reading of Shelley's other ballad, the notation of *imitation of speech* through textual device helps to elaborate what is happening in the very different poetic context of "Plant," where death indicates a lack of coherence or certainty rather than an event that suffuses all else with meaning. If voice and presence are effected by writing in "Mask," then in "The Sensitive Plant" life is effected through semblance and death by its imitation. While Shelley verges on a collapsing of life and death with aesthetics, a risk of which Redfield makes much in Shelley's work, his point here is in some sense to make an allegory out of vitalist terms, thus separating the sign and meaning in the terms life and death.

One way to comprehend this elusive final stanza is in such allegorical terms, which level the existential or ontological differences between life and death by calling attention to their mediation in language. Shelley can thus show us that death, at least inasmuch as we know what it is, is structured, like life, allegorically. Both are effected here through the non-identity of figuration in which language divides being and form, presence and writing. One way to read this division is as a constitutive confusion or undecidability that Elizabeth Grosz calls the "very openness and uncertainty, the fragility and force of and in the act of judgment itself" (197), where judgment here pertains to the relation between life and death. In this undecidability that interrogates the way that one is made intelligible through the other, there is a possibility implied, a freeing of life from the absolute difference of death.

This is certainly one implication of allegory's insistence on the non-identical relation of words and things. Such a gesture allows Shelley seems to weave the binary of

life and death together into a figure eight, inverting the two without resolving their relation. Death may not be the final end, Shelley declares, but neither is life real—it is a figure for error, ignorance, strife. Both are experienced like shadows of the dream, where the real is given through what it is not in infinite regress. Mockery would then simply continue this line of dissembling substitutions. Such a reading would be supported by the conceptual similarity and rhyme pattern shared by "seem," "dream," "be" and "mockery," which end four different lines. Interweaving the ridiculing and counterfeiting connotations of mockery, Shelley ends his poem by making life almost indistinguishable from death.

But this is not to underline some kind of transcendence of life beyond death. While the possibility of an afterlife makes light of death, death also gently mocks or ridicules life as a secure shore from which to ponder it. Chiasmically inverted, each puts the other into question. Toying with the extremity of Kantian correlation, Shelley seals human life within the shadow play of its own projections, suggesting at once that our perceptions might have nothing to do with what is while also implying that what is, is structured through the infinite regress of imitation. This conclusion in mockery would then be somewhat didactic or instructive, as it mocks us, the readers, for treating life as some kind of resistance or contradiction to death. It is "we" who are interpellated by this dream. We, "the shadows of the dream," suddenly seem to lose significance—in other words, "we" seem mocked into figures.

Such a humility, with its evening effect on the exceptionalism of human life and understanding, has been emphasized by a wide range of important criticisms that touch on Shelley's materialist notion of life as well as his understanding of aesthetic ideology.

Theresa M. Kelley has thus described the "Plant" as positioning life disturbingly in between the "distinctive categories of non-living and sentient," or the mechanical and vital. Kelley reads "The Sensitive-Plant" as a materialist reminder of "what life is: a densely particulate mix of material being and mind for which not decaying, not dying, is not an option" (214). In particular, Shelley's poem emphasizes that "human life, over against aspirations for forms of life beyond death," will also undergo "the cycle of life, death, and decay." Exemplifying the work of figurative language, Kelley suggests, Shelley makes entities that ought to be strictly distinct resemble one another. With this concluding gesture, the exceptionalism of life is put into question by the poem, as is a death that would mark its distinction from nonhuman matter. Becoming indistinct from one another, each are made into parts of a generalized repetition. What emerges as a difference from within such repetition is what Kelley calls the contingent or unexpected, an "opportunity for swerving away" in a kind of "eccentric, dazed, yet effective flight" (244).

In his reading of an entirely difference poem and context, Redfield similarly tracks Shelley's use of allegory to consider politics as staked on an elusive materiality that always risks effacement in the semblance of phenomenal presence, the conversion of what Kelley calls a cycle of life into a life beyond death. For Redfield, then, it is crucial to read revolution as enabled by the cyclical and repetitive—the very structure of writing for Redfield—which promise the iterative possibility of a future that might escape but also threaten to collapse into an aestheticized unity between life and politics. Thus, contingency here is also identified with a constitutive failure of the aesthetic to absorb history into a life beyond the repetition of the material, which refers to an event that only

ever appears as arbitrary. Thus, in the "Mask of Anarchy" it is a "pulse of death and dispersal within [a] political-aesthetic dream […] that makes politics possible" (161) through an aesthetics "open to the contingency of history, and the constitutive uncertainty of futurity" (171). Shelley assumes the risk of collapsing poetry and history, like that risk of collapsing life and death, knowing that the materiality of political praxis ensures that the violence of an aesthetic drive to unity and identification will never prove complete. Although Redfield is not concerned with Shelley's understanding of biological life, or botanical life for that matter, both Kelley and Redfield understand the termination or failure of aestheticized life to be the opening for a materialist politics.

I want to suggest that a different kind of materiality or nonhuman history is implied by Shelley's trope of mockery. In contrast to the "cycle of life, death, and decay" and its contingency that appears absolute to the extent that it is entirely random within the determinacy of that cycle, like the escape from or dispersal of death, mockery translates the opening of the arbitrary, the facticity of its occurrence, into an ever so slight gesture towards a political effect. While much of Shelley's concluding stanza indeed figures life as a semblance that can easily be inverted, or as the dream of a sleeping death, the concluding turn to mockery implies a barely glimpsed shift in figurative registers. Mockery implies a shift in figurative power from the iterative to the ironic, leaving the poem with an opening to the very question of origin and its structuring of cycles in which escape or accident appear as the sole mode of survival. Unlike figurations of cognition that play with epistemology—seem, dream, be—mockery's off rhyme introduces a more distinctly political reference. Jennifer Bajorek describes irony in precisely this way, as "an infinitely repeated and repeatable interruption of two *incomparable* meanings, one of

which is always the other's negation, and neither of which can establish itself in a position of historical precedence, or 'pure anteriority' in relation to the other […] *there is still anteriority* […] but we are deprived of any reliable index as to what is past or belongs to the present." Irony in these terms "opens [history] toward more explicitly political questions" (24). Instead of a mild rebuke to readers who indulge the fantasy of transcendence, then, mockery elevates the troping of transience into a trope of unstable anteriority. Mockery thus is not strictly a trope of repetition or cyclicality, I want to suggest, but of an implicit struggle over its setting—of what is incomparable and negates primacy. There is something of what Benjamin calls genius and Fanon calls a "fundamental jolt" that recognizes in the destabilization of origins a delegitimizing of the order of things (10). As such, mockery tropes *origination,* not substitution or repetition. It doubles back on the infinite regress of cyclical contingency that demonstrates finitude, the kind of repetition that Redfield himself tropes as the "stutter of 'these words' […] we read again, again, again" (159). Rather, mockery refolds such repetition into a question, a putting into question, of determination. What I am trying to isolate in this most minor of figurative shifts, then, is how mockery might help us to "think necessity as the becoming-necessary of contingent encounters" instead of "thinking of contingency as a modality of or an exception to the necessary" (Althusser qtd. in Read 30).

This distinction matters to me because it focuses our reading not on a contingency that intervenes to unsettle the necessary—be it death or reading—but rather inflects necessity with contingent origins. To rephrase Althusser through Shelley, we might say that in the poem repetition occurs as the becoming-repetitive through a ridiculing and delegitimizing turn. But to think this constitutively, rather than as the "exception," is a

key problem for this poem and this chapter. Indeed, my interest in mockery has to do with how this last figure turns away from semblance and indistinction and into a ridicule and profanity that might be understood as an origin through which the rest of the poem can be retroactively read. It offers a desynonimization of sorts, splitting semblance into ridicule, perception into power. Thus, as I wrote before, mockery's indistinction is not entirely leveling or inverting and its power is not only humbling or arbitrary. Mockery turns the levelling fate in which "nothing is but all things seem" into an image that laughs at the most certain of cycles. Like satire or effigy, mockery's troubling or doubling of representation has an explicitly political effect. It denaturalizes the repetition of how "all things seem," shifting into a trope that ridicules the status of the original that initiates imitation. The end of the poem implies the possibility of a difference within the figurative inversions of life/death and nature/history that reroutes indistinction into irony, which opens origination up to a struggle over, in Bajorek's words, "what is past or belongs to the present."

In this instance of the final turn of the poem, what Agamben calls the "semblance of coincidence" in the Latin *versure*, the infinite iterations of semblance (seem/shadows/dream) change registers. Mockery is a different doubling, not just a figure for continual substitution but a *difference* of counterfeiting that derides, of a making seem that marks as profane.

This last *volta* registers as irony, not so much a figure of confusion as one of destruction. Irony approaches a "certain limit of reason" that empties out the security of knowledge and presents history in its irrational, unintentional and distinctly nonhuman nature. Irony's prompting of this limit thus does not only render human life a fantasy. It

stages the structure or conditions through which that fantasy emerges to make up for the absence of reason at the site of origin. Bajorek describes irony as a kind of synonym of mockery, noting that it *counterfeits* the real in language to make something happen—the limits of understanding thus approach the trace of an event. This notion of irony does not only underline the uncertainty of human knowledge. What Bajorek calls irony is a way to approach the structure of origin or reference to the real through an eventful division between language and understanding rather than through their identification. In the last turn of Shelley's stanza we approach a similar potentiality of an event induced at the limit of equalizing inversions that shifts its mode from inversion to irreverence.

Shelley's destruction of the exceptionalism of human life does not conclude as a resolution, then, even if the similarity between mockery and the preceding turns inscribe "a difference [the poem] encourages us to efface" (Redfield 159). While the poem exposes the effacing of difference between semblance and mockery, this last turn also leaves us with an implication of its repression in material things rather than only in language or voice. There is something concrete and even plastic in the notion of mockery as a thing that is made: "a deceptive or counterfeit representation *of* something." With this final reference, Shelley seems to consolidate the perceptual ambiguities that allow our investment in human life and anthropomorphosis into a thing or object that delimits consciousness while glimpsing another mode of creation. Shelley thus hinges language and things, *poeisis* and *tekhne*, through a history to be found in a repressed reference to matter that is "no longer purely ruled by the concerns or categories of human agency" (Hanssen 26). While mockery desubjectivizes such agency and destabilizes the power of human distinction, it does not stop there. Indeed, its latent reference to the world of

objects or things suggests that the undercutting of human agency is useful *inasmuch as it turns us to a history that is antagonistic or contradictory to the history that consciousness would tell*. Such a history would not only deanimate life or equalize life and death, but could also wrest a politics out of the equation of life and things or the "nonliving and the sentient" by moving equivalence ("like all the rest") into a ridicule of order. This experience that I have been calling a shift in registers is significant as an index of a language that is material rather than cognitive or phenomenological and from which we can begin to reread the representation of nature that comes before it.

Earlier stanzas of the poem continuously play out the difficulty of grasping hold of such histories precisely because of an aesthetic overdetermination of material parts by anthropomorphosis. The cognitive disruptions we have just witnessed in the late philosophical turn of "The Sensitive-Plant" are first enacted by the poem's earlier narrative stanzas, appearing at the beginning as pure anthropomorphism. "Part First" and "Part Second" continually perform anthropomorphic gestures, in which an identity is forged across all members, botanical and human, in the "undefiled Paradise" of Shelley's garden. For instance, Shelley provides the following list of entities within the garden at the beginning of the poem:

> The light winds from which unsustaining wings
> Shed the music of many murmurings;
> The beams which dart from many a star
> Of the flowers whose hues they bear afar
> […]

> The quivering vapours of dim noontide,
> Which like a sea o'er the warm earth glide
> In which every sound, and odour, and beam
> *Move, as reeds in a single stream*; (I:79-82, 90-93, my emphasis)

Anthropomorphosis does not primarily work to transform the nonhuman into the human in the passage above. These introductory lines of the poem instead gesture towards a metaphysical identification between parts and whole. This function of anthropomorphosis is much closer to what Sara Guyer has described as "a means of conceiving or effecting unity or sameness" (*Romanticism* 62).[65] This gesture, which differs fundamentally from that of tropes like prosopopeia or apostrophe, conflates particular life with a metaphysical substance of life for which "man is merely a synonym." Shelley's "single stream," composed of the distinct entities of winds, starlight, vapour, and flowers, verges on such a conflation that is reminiscent of Coleridge's ideal of "unity in multeity." That Coleridgean dialectic exemplified the idealizing tendencies of a certain nineteenth century notion of "life form," in which each individual expression was a part of a larger "aesthetic, self-determining, teleological" organism (Halmech and Roosth 28). Here Shelley's environment seems to follow from it, appearing not for itself but as an effect of a larger purpose.

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[65] Guyer follows Barbara Johnson and Paul de Man in discounting anthropomorphosis to be a trope. Other work concerned with traditional tropes of animation would include: *The Rhetoric of Romanticism,* Paul de Man; *Untimely Beggar: Poverty and Power from Baudelaire to Benjamin*, Patrick Greaney; "Growing Old Together: Lucretian Materialism in Shelley's 'Triumph of Life'", Amanda Goldstein.

Indeed, environment here almost seems a misnomer. What we read instead is a play on aesthetic philosophy in verse, which at its extreme treats Nature as a product entirely of representation. That is, as Frederick Beiser has argued, the emphasis above is on "aesthetic experience" as the "[justification] of an organic unity in nature" rather than on the empirical reality of nature as such, independent of subjective perception (81). But as we see towards the middle of "Part First," harmonious Nature is represented only *as if* was the product of Consciousness:

> And when evening descended from Heaven above,
> And the Earth was all rest, and the Air was all love,
> And delight, though less bright, was far more deep,
> And the day's veil fell from the world of sleep,
>
> And the beasts, and the birds, and the insects were drowned
> In an ocean of dreams without a sound
> Whose waves never mark, though they ever impress
> The light sand which paves it—Consciousness (I: 98-105)

Reminding us of Guyer's definition of anthropomorphosis, Consciousness appears above as a substance or metaphysics. The feature we most identify with the human slips over into the impersonal substance of creator in these definitions, imparting both "human form and attributes to the Deity" and "human attributes […] to anything impersonal or

irrational" ("Anthropomorphic") [66] But in this passage, Shelley also calls attention not just to anthropomorphic unity or sameness, but also to the "means" of that effect—namely syntax and figure. That is, it is only *as if* Nature was the product of a Consciousness that is vaguely divine and human.[67]

If we read this passage carefully we note that Shelley's use of mockery is already at play, counterfeiting the appearance of organic unity through parts that don't add up. Indeed, these two stanzas are remarkable in their rendering of harmony or unity through a figure of Consciousness that is entirely unreliable—that of sand. Like much of Shelley's poetry, the anthropomorphic identification of the particular and the whole, a gesture that subsumes all parts as an expression of one substance, is shown to be the product of a language that is *incommensurate* with it. In other words, aesthetics is produced and disrupted by tropes. Not only does the repetition of "And" in the first five lines show each discrete element to be simply strung together, rather than resolved in each other. But the vocabulary that effects this scene of nature is also discontinuous: "descended," "all rest," "all love," "less bright," "more deep," "fell" and "drowned." Separated from the rhythm in which they flow, the material Shelley uses to produce an appearance of harmony has no integral connection. Lastly, we should note that the very "agent" of anthropomorphosis, Consciousness, is not the creator of this scene but the shifting sand upon which it takes place. Reminiscent of the disfiguring brain become sand in "Triumph

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[66] It is worth noting that this slippage also defined the problem of organicism as such, which risked turning natural genius not into a trait of human mastery but rather of unconscious, unwilled inspiration. See M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, 184-218.

[67] The implication that nature is a product of art, and not the other way around, has certainly informed key critical texts in literary criticism. See, for instance, Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, 147-222.

of Life," here Shelley figures through a softer touch the way in which the apparent force of aesthetic unity, the conscious mind, is the unstable ground that receives impressions. Shelley thus draws our attention not only to the failure of anthropomorphic identification in the garden, but also the success of its aestheticizing effects *through* a misreading of its disparate language. The *effect* of romantic ideology is produced through inharmonious means.

This production of Consciousness at the end of the stanza, where it seems logically poised as conclusion when it is in fact yet another figure of substitution, works like the ever-receding problem of history's relation to nature in Romanticism. Our arrival at this concluding concept urges us to read back onto the previous lines as if they were all adding up to and subsumed by it. But Consciousness gives way to a more metonymic than metaphorical structure here at the end. Instead of functioning as the sheltering or unifying term from which these parts of nature originate, it is poised at the end of the stanza as a term that can only retroactively draw together what remains incommensurate. The question that Shelley again highlights here is the effecting of a totality or identification through dissimilar and non-totalizing means. What is easily perceived as a closed and coherent system is achieved through the gaps and translations of disparate modes of figure and reference. My point here is not to suggest that the production of anthropomorphosis, and its related terms of unity and consciousness, is in reality heterogeneous and plural. In fact, what seems significant about this continual staging of differences as unity is that it is, indeed, effective. In other words, the inharmonious and differentiated materiality of language is here continually overdetermined by another process that concludes it with the gesture of totality. What I am trying to account for in

this passage is akin to what I described above as the problem of mockery, which is the fundamentally erroneous and disruptive workings of figurative language that nonetheless sediment into the appearance of the certainty of something: cyclicality, contingency, or, in this instance, consciousness. Shelley's use of the movement of tides is quite apt, as the tendency to impart to Consciousness an originating function threatens to wash away its figuration as a site of impression and inscription.

But this scene of "undefiled Paradise" is soon even more rudely disrupted. The power of aestheticizing artifice is thrown into question with the untimely death of the female gardener, the "ruling grace" of this domain. As with the ironic concluding lines of the poem, the female gardener's sudden and inexplicable death draws away the curtain of an illusion of life and reveals another life behind or beneath it:

> This fairest creature from early spring
> Thus moved through the garden ministering
> All the sweet season of summertide,
> And ere the first leaf looked brown—she died! (II: 57-60)

Much like the final lines of the poem, this stanza breaks the cognitive rhythm previously established by poem, one in which life and Consciousness, humanity and divinity only seem *as if* they were seamlessly substituted one for the other. Unlike the previous lines in the poem where the sound of the ballad and the semantic sense of the poem at least approximated one another, here sound and sense diverge distinctly.[68]

[68] For more on the importance of sound and sense to poetry, see Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, where Agamben defines poetry through their dissonance or difference.

Nothing in the preliminary representations of life in the poem prepares us for this radically contingent event. If the previous stanzas teased at the aesthetics' promise of a dialectical unity, even immortality, of Consciousness and Nature here that tease becomes a taunt.

With this exclamatory line, Shelley puts into poetry what his friend William Lawrence, an infamous proponent of materialism and later a renowned surgeon, once wrote in his *Rees Cyclopedia* entry on Life:

> For example, let us contemplate a female in the prime of youth and health. The elegant voluptuous form, that graceful flexibility of motion, that gentle warmth, those cheeks crimsoned with the roses of delight, those brilliant eyes, darting rays of love […] seem all united to form a most fascinating being. A moment is sufficient to destroy this illusion. Motion and sense often cease without any apparent cause […] The flesh becomes successively blue, green, and black […] In a word, after a few short days there remains only a small number of earthy and saline principles.[69]

The end of Shelley's "Part Second" affirms Lawrence's materialist position. Against the immortalizing implications of an anthropomorphic substance of life, human flesh is here disfigured. The inexplicable death of the female gardener imitates Lawrence's treatment of the end of life as arbitrary, "without any apparent cause." Life is not given as an identity or unity, but instead as an illusion, pace Lawrence, or an imitation, pace Shelley,

[69] "Life." *The Cyclopædia, or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, 702.

of something *it is not*. This non-identity of life with itself is disfiguring, as it reopens the gap between aesthetic perception and material remains from above. Like Shelley's granulated Consciousness, Lawrence's Life appears in the grotesque form of "blue, green and black […] earthy and saline principles." But Shelley uses disfiguration as a poetic *volta*, or turn to another, stranger mode of animation—a mockery of anthropomorphosis:

> The garden once fair became cold and foul
> Like the corpse of her who had been its soul
> Which at first was lovely as if in sleep
> Then slowly changed, till it grew a heap
> To make men tremble who never weep
> […]
> Between the time of the wind and the snow
> All loathliest weeds began to grow,
> Whose coarse leaves were splashed with many a speck
> Like the water-snake's belly and the toad's back
>
> And thistles, and nettles, and darnels rank,
> And the dock, and the henbane, and hemlock dank,
> Stretched out its long and hollow shank
> And stifled the air, till the dead wind stank
>
> And plants, at whose names the verse feels loath,

> Filled the place with a monstrous undergrowth,
> Prickly, and pulpous, and blistering, and blue,
> Livid, and starred with a lurid dew,
>
> And agarics and fungi with mildew and mould
> Started like mist from the wet ground cold;
> Pale, fleshy,—as if the dead
> With a spirit of growth had been animated! (II: 17-21, 50-66)

In the intermediary narrative stanzas of the poem, disfiguration takes on a life of its own. These disfigurations of nonhuman character provide an extended figure in life of what Shelley calls mockery at the end of the poem. That is, they transgress the border of inversion between life and death, cleaving figuration from its epistemological mode and into a more political one through what Agamben has called a zone of indistinction between life and death. Where Lawrence's disfigured life resolved itself in those "saline principles" of death, Shelley pursues the afterlife of disfiguration. In Shelley's reading, disfigured life returns in animated form—and it returns with a vengeance. "Part Third" of the poem introduces readers to what Shelley later describes as "forms of living death." These forms imitate animation in such a way that can only be called ironic, as they take decay for its opposite and turn it into a liveliness. What was once a ballad to organic uniformity makes an ugly turn, disassembling its unified body into a corpse. Even the movement of figuration here seems to have changed. Whereas before flowers were seen to open out beneath the protective shelter of the sky, here weeds and fungi start up from

beneath the ground. The undergrowth in this garden does not turn its face outward to receive the light but instead exposes the hidden, underground structure of the flowers' symbolism, one that reveals base darkness beneath divine light. Anticipating Georges Bataille's "The Language of Flowers" by more than one hundred years, Shelley upends the "angelic and lyrical purity" of the flower's corolla and supplants it with the "loving rottenness" of roots and stems and their "filthy, glaring sacrilege." The alluring and uncanny "lurid dew" that draws our mind's eye to an animated death is undeniable. It lures us in to watching, and perhaps desiring, the termination of beauty in favor of a "troubling contempt for all that is […] *elevated,* noble, sacred" (14). These disfigured figures mark a singularly enticing moment that may not be available elsewhere in Romantic poetry, a moment that mocks the living rather than simply reducing it to the mechanical principles of death.[70]

But disfiguration is more than surface deep here—that is, it runs deeper than the inversion of symbols of life. This series of stanzas also uses less lively features of language, namely the repetitive and heavy sound of a dense alliteration. Like his previous list of life forms, the line "And thistles" produces a sequence of entities related only by conjunctions. Shelley's language becomes not only alliterative, but it also repeats the same hard phonemes over and over, stringing a series of t, d, s and p together, producing the dead weight of an unlively cadence. In addition, whereas the eponymous Sensitive Plant of the poem denoted a proper name within a classificatory order, each of the names listed by Shelley here are common names (thistles, nettles, darnels, etc.) without any such

[70] Perhaps the closest parallel examples of such "forms of living death" could be found in Shelley's own depiction of Rousseau in his "Triumph of Life" or in William Blake's *America a Prophecy.* On Shelley's representation of Rousseau, see Goldstein, "Growing Old Together."

propriety. Without proper names, set adrift from the substance of anthropomorphosis, these words are amassed as a series of repetitive letters that form the "common clay" of the garden. They are simply a "heap," a collection of particles, or what Erasmus Darwin described as the "congary of parts" of vegetable life. This congary is enacted both by Shelley's descriptive language as well as the non-semantic features of language that pile onto each other. These plants are a "heap" as Shelley writes, separated only by one letter from the dead. This is what it looks like to be animated in poetry without anthropomorphosis, and Shelley's own language barely seems to be able to sustain such life. Perhaps this is why the handful of illustrators that attempted to visualize Shelley's poem never depicted this monstrous undergrowth. Rather, they show sinewy, decayed human skeletons or more symbols of death like a harsh winter.

Figure 1. L. Housman. *The Sensitive Plant* (1898)

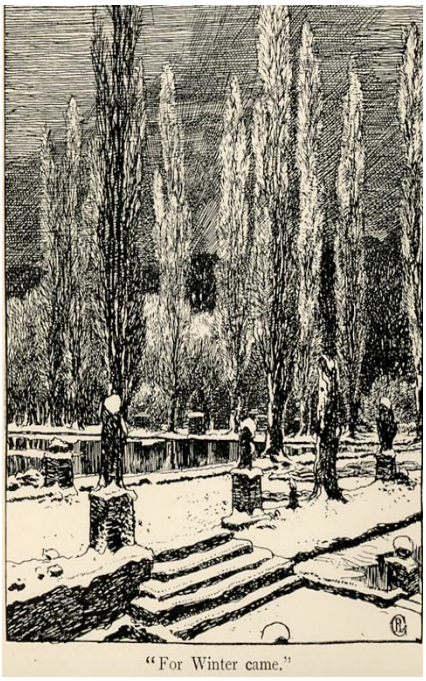

Figure 2. F.L. Griggs *The Sensitive Plant* (1902)

"Forms of living death" seem almost impossible to imagine. Like the decaying corpses with whom Victor Frankenstein spends his days, they maintain a face "in 'bloom' even as corpses corrode," where "mortification is the sign of life's recovery" (Guyer *Romanticism* 76). These stanzas hint at the possibility of partial animation through corrosion, a life that is non-identical to anthropomorphic life. Shelley's "forms of living dead" are disfigured because they bring the Nature that was given in "Parts First" and "Parts Second" to a limit. But this "monstrous undergrowth" is not the opposite or antithesis of what came before. Rather, it is a mockery of that Paradise. These uprising forms are an obvious counterfeit of a more proper or divine life. They ridicule by taking on a semblance of anthropomorphic form, and adding insult to injury they live on after it.

In a twist on what Agamben has called bare life, these "agarics and fungi and mildew and mould" remain suspended somewhere between life and death.

Through disfiguration, they figure the philosophical conundrum of Mockery that Shelley sets up at the end of the poem, gesturing before philosophy to a poetic form of life that seems impossible to imagine. These "forms of living death" undo both the chronology or cycle of life, death, and decay, bringing a mockery of origination into a figure of life, rather than a figure for life. Indeed, they seem to try and offer a language for an ironic mode of life, a life of the "infinitely repeated and repeatable interruption of two *incomparable* meanings" (Bajorek). In contrast to the smooth allure of counterfeited Consciousness, "forms of living death" intensify contradiction and disharmony while forcing them to live together.

Part II: Primitive Accumulation and Natural History

When Shelley offers us a paradisiacal garden "In which every sound, and odour, and beam/ Move, as reeds in a single stream;" he gives us a myth of nature. These stanzas that begin the "Plant," present a nature seemingly without beginning. Such atemporal nature is unified, idyllic and beautiful. This myth of a nature without history, however, is shown to be an effect of a more material and linguistic operation, as I tried to show above. Thus, at certain points of the poem a demystification takes place, both of aestheticized nature and mortal life. What seemed to have no beginning is revealed to be retroactive; what was anthropomorphized becomes ironic. At the end of the poem, mockery turns back to name what the poem's refiguration of origins and nature, the

nature of origins, has already performed. Namely, a demystification that fails to reveal the real and that has only, as I argued above, shifted the site of this problem from a phenomenal to a material register. But that materiality is not finally expressed by the cyclical, orderly time of nature in which human life decays like all other. I want to argue here that that Shelley's disfigured figures are neither strictly indexes of the mystified origins or their reconstitution in cyclicality, but rather of the impossible work of designating origins that might help us to think the politics of nature in Romanticism.

As I described above, there are two predominant and related modes of reading Shelley's poetics of history and contingency. While both immensely helpful in situating Shelley's critique of progress and ideology, I am not sure that either cyclical time or contingency-as-accident fully accounts for Shelley's "forms of living death." Read together, these positions position contingency as the unexpected event or the random occurrence within the cyclical. But perhaps this relation between natural cycles and the contingencies that denaturalize them are inadequate to thinking the forms that Shelley calls into being and the ironic twist of mockery that gets the last word of the poem. Indeed, there is something radically *non-cyclical* in the embodied conjunction of life and dead and something radically *non-contingent* in their naturalization. This living decay and animated death brings origin and end to live together in a kind of simultaneity, denying both the recurrent and the random. The marker of absolute contingency, death, does not become regeneration through time or duration. It contaminates time to make contingency an animating power. No longer simply the undoing of anthropomorphosis through the fated repetition of cycles from which no life escapes, these plants figure the

decay of time as a form of life, "as if the dead/ With a spirit of growth had been animated!"

These figures of disfiguration, which draw out in long form what mockery names at the end, gesture towards "the mutual imbrication of nature and history […] pointing to a duplicitous origin and to originary transience" of a kind that Beatrice Hanssen has read in both Benjamin and Adorno (16). Not satisfied with a figurative inversion or confusion that would make human life another mode of mortal death in which transience is our fate, Shelley's lines work to posit something that is *originary* in transience or constitutively accidental. The disfigured forms, like mockery's shift from semblance, textualize an event that remakes life and death together in a seemingly impossible and paradoxical relation, one that cannot be accounted for through a historical time that cites a single origin. "Forms of living death" produce a form of an ongoing—living—inclusion or incorporation of what is incomparable or incommensurate to it—death. This mutual imbrication of duplicitous origin, call it natural history or forms of living death, separates nature and intention such that some other form is seen to live through the abandonment of intention's grounding order.

Here Shelley's mockery of life and death and "forms of living death" can only be read ambivalently. If they are figures that allow us to glimpse something of the disruption of cyclicality and the arbitrary within repetition, then they are also figures of the liveability or survivability of a violence without origin, of what can live on when the semblance of identification is drawn away. They figure the blankness of a constitutive event that myth covers over. In some sense, these figures live out what David L. Clark and Tilottama Rajan have called "the fundamentally nonhuman character of language

[…] *felt* or luridly described as […] the threat of extinction and dismemberment at the hands of the monstrous" (13). That is, it is a name of a fundamental haunting of the structure of language. This nonhuman nature of language is a constituent part of what defines the human, the excluded part that is irreducible and felt as a termination of that which it originated. Clark and Rajan locate this constitutive monstrosity with matters of linguistic origination and the archeperformative's "in-determinate opening of signification" for which ideation and aesthetics attempts to give meaning. These monstrous origins seem appropriate to the fundamentally nonhuman character of nature in Shelley's poem and the undoing of aestheticized nature that does not provide solace in revealing what it falsifies. The nonhuman forms we find there [posit] origin as an undoing, "forms of living death." Here we would seem to approach the most linguistic and philosophical poetry, an engagement with the very question of how the positing and unintentional force of language brings us to the limit of what can be said about life.

But I want to suggest otherwise. I am interested in the affinity that Shelley's poem, and especially its figuring and disfiguring of nature, shares with what Marx described as the process of primitive accumulation, and through which we might extend beyond the epistemological or linguistic in attending to nature and the nonhuman in the Romantic period through capitalism and colonialism. I want to draw out the latent logic of Shelley's poem through what Gavin Walker has described, in a manner that resonates with Clark and Rajan's deconstructive sense, as "the uncanny force that grounds the untraceable origin of […] mechanisms themselves" but that is "expressed in its ultimate form in the colonial laboratory of relations the form of enclosure called the nation-state (Walker 392).

Primitive accumulation appears ironically as a kind of spontaneous, sporous generation in the section "So-called primitive accumulation" of *Capital*. There Marx mocks the seemingly magical accumulation of capital, its seeming absence of origins prior to capitalism, by writing that "Great fortunes sprang up like mushrooms in a day; primitive accumulation proceeded without the advance of even a shilling (917). The fungal figure may be incidental but it reveals a deeper symmetry with the "Plant," which is the erasure of origination that nature effects. Figured through forms that live off decay and turn decay in to life, primitive accumulation is said to move forward in the absence of advance, as if nothing came before it; or "as if the dead/ With the spirit of growth had been animated." Primitive accumulation "proceeded," it originates from and continues, without the "advance" of a purposive movement that is the lending of money in this example. It is a movement of a nature not like its own, of an unintentional and non-commodified form. Primitive accumulation tells a story of origination without precedence, an emergence without relation. It is a "homogenous and empty time in which the systematic logic of capital has been transformed into a set of natural 'laws'" (Nemser 170).

Marx goes on to deconstruct this logic of primitive accumulation as a structure of unaccountable origin and a self-effacing violence constitutive of capitalism that is continually excised from it. Like Shelley's "forms of living death," such accumulation intimates an immanence of extinction and dismemberment to emergence and animation. This nonhuman historicity is also explicitly a violence to intentionality and cognition, rendering the retroactive naming of consciousness as a cause only a mockery of what really happened. As in the "Plant," consciousness is an erosive ground that receives

impression rather than gives structure. The difficulty of reading both primitive accumulation and Shelley's forms is precisely this voiding of intention or design that nonetheless takes the impression—like consciousness—of a preconceived plan. This nonhuman character of primitive accumulation creates a nature like the mildew and mold of Shelley's poem, a nature of "originary transience" that is *made* out of the monstrous. It is this shared relational logic that I am interested in drawing out by locating Shelley's "Plant" within the logic of primitive accumulation.

It must be acknowledged, of course, that primitive accumulation is traditionally understood as a transformation of labor, not of nature. Marx described primitive accumulation as the precondition of capital's emergence through the conjunction of a series of events prior to the 18th century, in which feudal laborers were transformed into "free" laborers, as well as "'vagabonds,' criminals and beggars" (Walker 388) and common lands were enclosed.[71] And yet, primitive accumulation is unthinkable without a narrative of origins and human nature. That is, it is constituted through a historical process that naturalizes the accumulation of capital, always presupposing itself without an account of its origination.[72] It is historic in a particular sense, not as an empirical or chronological phenomenon but through a retroactive mystification that is, in short, a story about nature.

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[71] For a marvelous history of the quotidian practice of sabotage and resistance to primitive accumulation in early modern England, see Peter Linebaugh's *The London Hanged*.

[72] "Thus, as much as so-called primitive accumulation posits a theory of the formation of the capitalist mode of production, albeit one predicated on a presupposed division between the diligent and the lazy, it turns this explanation toward the present in the form of a moral tale […] Not only does the theory of so-called primitive accumulation function in the present, aiming for the present of a particular moral characterization of the present, but it never leaves the present even as it offer itself as history. The theory of 'primitive accumulation' takes the idealized memory of an individual capitalist's accumulation [..] and turns it into the conditions of capitalist accumulation in general

As many note this is what leads Marx to entitle the section in *Capital* devoted to primitive accumulation "so-called primitive accumulation," because of its mythified origins in bourgeois economics, but also because of his own resistance to reinscribing a singular, historical moment of emergence. Rather, his trademark irony in that section is marshalled to posit the problem of anteriority without solving it.[73] Instead, irony suggests a series of felicitous events through which capital both emerged and then set itself as necessary and natural progress. Irony, like mockery, denaturalizes without humanizing. The nature of primitive accumulation, which involves human nature in its retroactive account, is cut through with a foundational contingency, a weaving together of the unintentional with the overdetermined. Thus, Marx's notion of the dispossession, enclosure and reorganization of social forms through the "freeing" of labor in the transformation of feudal society was a series of events "generated by contingency" (Read 30) and "an endlessly regressive series of presuppositions" (Walker 386). Primitive accumulation emerges out of a constitutive transience that will then set for itself a mythical origin as natural process.

But it also takes an acutely poetic form. As Gavin Walker describes, it is "the quintessential but untraceable origin" that makes possible the translation of difference into equivalence (392). This "insistence on a relation of equivalence," the "transformation of the primal flux of heterogeneity into commensurability" is apropos too of Shelley's first few stanzas, which work like much Romantic poetry to perform the

[73] Jennifer Bajorek's discussion of irony, which I glossed above, is explicitly linked to primitive accumulation, which she describes as an "allegorical fracture at the origin. In direct proportion as the history of the one/the self/the same's relation to the other is covered up, this history is preserved in, and as, a temporal relay between signs" (23).

aestheticization of nature.[74] Like anthropomorphosis, primitive accumulation retroactively signifies incommensurate parts as if they shared a common substance. It makes harmonious accord out of difference, effecting of sameness through what is unlike. And just as much as the "Plant" negotiates the difference from within the semblance of sameness, Jord/ana Rosenberg has described primitive accumulation as a kind of problem of metonymy akin to the poem's revelation of a persistent difference between parts and the appearance of a whole. She writes that both primitive accumulation and Marx's inquiry into it enacts a monstrosity that "has less to do with what monstrosity itself is" and has more to do with "a question about the relationship of parts to wholes'" (200). Untraceability of origins, unstable anteriority and a disfigured relation of parts to whole ought all to recall what I was trying to describe at work in Shelley's trope of mockery. But what this concept brings to the fore is the consolidation of violence that absent origination and the monstrous forms it brings about. Posing the question of the origin of primitive accumulation is a way of tracking "the supposedly smooth functioning of the circuit of capitalist accumulation—a putative smoothness whose very existence discloses capital's cyclical erasure of its own repetitive violence and instability" (Walker 385). The relations it animates about are almost identical to the structure of anthropomorphosis that Shelley stages in his poem, down to the allure and ease of reading in them a self-confirming process in which incommensurability goes unnoticed.

While Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy" might seem a more appropriate poem for considering the effects of that accumulation England's proletariat, I turn to his "Plant"

[74] See also Jordan/a Rosenberg's "Monstrously Unpositable" where they write, "Capital is a dissection, the point of origin of which is never reached, indeed never positable […] It is accessible only through a figuration" (202). It is hard to not hear a deconstructive logic of a kind here that Paul de Man and others read into the most rigorous of Romantic poetry.

because it is about nature in both in an aesthetic and originating mode. Thus it is useful as a poem that engages with the *logic* of primitive accumulation rather than with its more historical *setting*. Shelley's poem takes up the procedure of equalization and hierarchization of nature through the semblance of anthropomorphosis—the forcing of parts into a homogenous whole—and continues to think what forms of life emerge through its negation. And it is only at end that the poem turns to reflect and establish this fanciful allegory or myth as a more serious engagement with the setting of cycles and the problem of origins. Significantly, then, Shelley perhaps takes up a logic akin to primitive accumulation, but not in relation to the proletariat, or labor, or enclosure, but as a logic that is retroactively operative within a poetic cultivation of nature. What Marx, Walker, Rosenberg and others present as a matter of capital, Shelley's "Plant" marks as a question about nature. This poem plays out the undoing of mythified nature without returning to some more stable position of understanding. Indeed, what it proposes in the wake of its deconstruction of aestheticized nature is a set of figures that incorporate the negation of a reliable origin point into forms of life themselves.

In closing this section I want to draw out the other reference that remains implicit within both the "Plant" and commentaries of primitive accumulation. This veiled reference, not insignificant in its absence, has to do with the impossibility of reading nature in and after the Romantic period outside of the colonial project.[75] Shelley and

[75] Quite appropriately, Paul Youngquist and Frances Botkin describe the amnesia of consistent reference to colonialism and slavery in Romantic criticism in much the manner that Shelley tropes the relation between nature and consciousness as an impression. They write of Romantic anthologies that, "The absence of any reference to the West Indies leaves the impression (if indeed an *absence* can impress) that nothing of historical significance occurred there." And further that "The whiteness of Romantic studies is a symptom of amnesia. It bespeaks a massive act of forgetting on the part of contemporary scholarship, an institutional disavowal of the

Marx converge here again in eyeing a colonial context without centering it. While I will make more out of this below, the very name of Shelley's poem, "The Sensitive Plant," cannot be fully read outside the epistemological project of colonialism. As Kelley makes clear by launching her introduction to *Clandestine Marriage* in a Scottish colony in Panama, it is in the colonies that the figurative language of botany causes problems. Similarly, Marx nods to colonialism in the "So-called primitive accumulation" section, writing that:

> The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. *These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation* (915)

The violence of origins is unnamable not only because of contingency, but because of geography; not only because of the leap from enclosure to wage labor, but because of the emergence of wage labor in Europe through enslavement elsewhere. Marx makes clear, if only briefly, that the animation of capital's cycle of accumulation is imminent to an embodied and mass violence of global, geographic scope. Above all what ensures the appearance of an idyllic and natural process is a violence through which nature emerges

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economic conditions that help make cultural production during the Romantic Era possible: the maritime economy of the Atlantic" (Par. 1).

from death, dismemberment, decay. Idyllic nature is animated by death. As Marx writes in the section of *Capital* entitled "So-called Primitive Accumulation," "Capital comes dripping head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (926).

While Shelley does not name colonialism in his poem, it is not possible to read its construction of nature without it. First and foremost this would require treating the concept of nature as if it was ever developed outside the divisions between metropolis and colony, uncivilized and civilized, etc. that we know constitutes Romantic-era nature. But more specifically, I think that we cannot read this poem outside the colonial context of primitive accumulation because of the particular logic of natural history through which it operates. This point will be made more explicitly below, in my reading of Stedman, but for now I want to note that the aestheticization of nature I've detailed above is an acutely spatializing one that, while not scientific, reflects a mode of scientific representation in the Romantic period. Thus, Walker links the transformation of space in primitive accumulation to the formation of taxonomies and the empirical sciences, where the "process of enclosure is not only the process of expropriation and dispossession but also, and at the same time, it is a process of cataloguing, diagramming, and fixing singularities into a hierarchized systems of classification that is made commensurable" (391).

But when Marx describes the domination of space in America, India and Africa he goes beyond its occurrence through the Enlightenment science so much in question in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The heightened irony of his conclusion to such domination as the "idyllic proceedings" of primitive accumulation comments as an aestheticization that made nature through ahistorical and pastoral representation. Idyll, a diminutive of *eidos*,

is a spatializing term that refers to "form, picture."[76] Shelley's "Plant," and in particular Part I and Part II, offer up such a picture of nature, not as the object of knowledge but as the natural harmony that makes for teleological history, the history that presupposes itself and erases it origins like sand in a tide. Hence the significance of what Mary Louise Pratt has described in the conjuncture of classification and narrative that "could constitute a sequence of events, or even produce a plot" (28) of non-exploited nature out of a specific mode of consciousness, "planetary consciousness." This consciousness traces a metonymic leap from time into space, from origins into interiors. Such aestheticization is crucially linked to a Romantic imagination in which the operations of the mind are mistaken as the originating power of nature, subsuming it into cognitive, reflective processes that aspire to substitute themselves as effects for causes, without remainder. That is, the intervention of an aesthetics of nature into primitive accumulation, especially as Shelley's poem performs it, is to demonstrate the retroactive naturalization of the cognitive or subjective as an originating and objective process. Thus it perhaps helps to refocus nature not just as a covering over of origins but as involved in their reconstitution, not as ideological overlay but as constitutive of the immaterial, disembodied production of history that can also be called the anthropomorphic.

Shelley's forms of living death might thus be read through a negative dialectics of primitive accumulation that reflects back on a pristine and idyllic nature to uncover its ghastly, nonhuman form. Shelley's forms, those that remain impossible to visually depict, figure a similar animation of impossible origins. A violence on the level of epistemology—what is knowable about origination—meet its incarnation in an

[76] For this reference I am indebted to the NASSR listserv and Michael Farber's "Etymologies of Terms for or about Poetry."

incalculable termination of life. “Forms of living death” seems as apt a description of this process as could be written.

Reading Marx and the process of primitive accumulation through Shelley thus helps to center the creation and constitution of nature through it. Rather than the strict effect upon and creation of labor power, primitive accumulation can be read as the repression of Romantic nature. Shelley’s overt deconstruction of anthropomorphosis, which takes apart its aestheticizing operation, [gestures] to the idyllic spatialization not only of British nature but to nature as it was constituted by the colonial. Thus, with Marx, it makes possible a thinking of primitive accumulation and its impossible origins through Romantic nature and what poetic disfigurations of the latter means, not as strictly aesthetic issue but as a distinctly political one. In other words, it draws the construction and decay of nature—both representationally and materially—into the political economy of labor and surplus value.

But one reason I read Shelley through Marx is to highlight the limits of the epistemological critique of his poem. That is, I feel that we need Marx in order to historicize a scientific and political epistemology that was always already under duress, of a kind that Shelley’s poem reveals, but in which duress cannot point the way to an escape. Rather, remaining with an ideological deconstruction of Romantic poetry and science risks fetishizing the virtues of epistemological uncertainty and fragility, rather than attending to the violence that maintains its security. After all, colonialism and the emergence of capitalism are much like reading, processes in which meaning and value are produced through and not despite instability.

Indeed, as Christopher Iannini helpfully notes, there was always already a fragility inscribed in the reading of natural history as it developed through colonialist trade of commodities and bodies. He describes the mode of reading mobilized by colonialist natural history as an emblematic one that "relied on sophisticated techniques of emblematic interpretation, requiring the reader to draw subtle connections between an image, its label, and accompanying linguistic descriptions as they discerned the hidden providential or socioethical significance of a natural object or human artifact (7).[77] The legibility of colonial objects of knowledge was thus always, as he writes, hidden and subtle, forged through non-identical references and figurative subterfuge. Reading, in other words, is the "transformation of the primal flux of heterogeneity into commensurability" that Walker understands as primitive accumulation. The instability of such transformations was not particular to emblematic reading. It also characterized the economic stability of empire from the outset: "Almost from the inception of the sugar revolution, signs of its seemingly inevitable collapse were already apparent. Problems with deforestation, soil erosion, soil exhaustion, and the invasion of pest species plagued a rising plutocracy, leading to declining agricultural yields and waves of species extinction. Such crisis resulted from the fact that, like the vast majority of people and consumer products in the Caribbean, much of the flora and fauna was also transplanted" (22). Such epistemological uncertainty—the product of language, transplanting, interpretation, revolution, and environment—is as much the story of colonization as is what Frantz Fanon called its compartamentalization.

[77] Iannini later points out that, "It is in part through emblematic method *rather than despite it* that the genre addresses those new questions of truth and virtue posed by the rise of scientific empiricism, mercantile capitalism, and liberal individualism" (39).

I have proposed this detour from Shelley through Marx to provide a slightly modified lens on the relation between the cyclical and the contingent that otherwise tends to characterize readings of the former. Treating Shelley's temporal logic in parallel to primitive accumulation recontextualizes contingency as a constitutive problem rather than random occurrence. In turn, however, Shelley's impossible to interpret "forms of living death" contribute to thinking colonialism and primitive accumulation by making nature the site of a negation of the negation, making the violence through which nature is created into the conditions of its undoing. In this sense, we must have a double reading of those ambivalent disfigurations, which trope the decay of originary nature that is at once a form of domination and at its limits. As Pratt suggests in conjoining science, colonialism and rebellion, "The systematization of nature coincides with the height of the slave trade, the plantation system, colonial genocide in North America and South Africa, slave rebellions in the Andes, the Caribbean, North America, and elsewhere" (35). What I hope to suggest below is that something like the originary transience towards which Shelley's poem orients us should be read both as epistemological critique, vis a vis the systematization of nature as a product of colonialism, and the political form it traces negatively, in the slave rebellions of Surinam.

Part III. Marronage and Mockery

In order to think the inherence of spatialization to colonialism, one only need to consult the first few pages of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, which describes the colonial world "as a compartmentalized world" with "its geographic configuration

and classification" (3). Neil Roberts has recently suggested another kind of negation from within Fanon's bifurcation, seeking to highlight the liminal positions that slaves inhabited in the process of constructing a freedom that was determined in relation to, but not by, European thought. Taking up Fanon's challenge to produce identities and terms that are completely other to European ones, and through the praxis of their destruction, Roberts takes up the grammar and practice of marronage as flight.

This interplay of the destructive and creative, the liminality and spatialization within colonialism offers a frame by which I want to approach Stedman's *Narrative* and what it apprehends, negatively, about the politics of marronage. In contrast to Agamben's determination of bare life as a zone through which sovereignty is continually reproduced, I want to argue that we can glimpse a liberatory genealogy in forms of life that remain unclassifiable as political life, or what Agamben calls *bios*. Here I turn to the *Narrative* to more fully consider an analogy between anti-colonial struggle and disfiguration, thus resituating the politics that might be thought through the poetic. Along with Roberts demand to think the demarcation of an insterstitial space from within, but on its way outside of, Enlightenment versions of revolution, this section attempts to escape traditional Romantic political historiographies in which revolution maintains a homogenous trajectory from the Enlightenment onwards.

Quite fittingly, Stedman's *Narrative* begins in much the same manner as the "Sensitive-Plant's" "undefiled Paradise." Stedman describes Surinam upon his arrival as:

> a large and beautiful garden stocked with everything that *nature and art* could produce to make the life of man both comfortable to himself and

> useful to society. All the luxuries and necessities for subsistence were crowding upon the inhabitants, while the five senses seemed intoxicated with bliss and, to use an old expression, Surinam was a land that overflowed with milk and honey (Stedman 33). [78]

Framed as the product of aesthetic unity rather than labor, certainly not imperialism, Stedman characterizes Surinam not just as a garden, but an Edenic paradise. Anticipating Alexander von Humboldt by decades, Stedman turns away from an Enlightenment treatment of nature as a machine or as parts to be classified, instead treating it as the site of man's restoration through art—and, of course, through the new world.[79] This passage comes only shortly after one in which Stedman expresses support for colonialism in aesthetic terms. His support is expressed not in the terms of the good but rather in the Kantian terms of the beautiful. Stedman instrumentalizes Kantian beauty and makes plantations appear as an *unintentional* product of nature, developed without slave labor and prior centuries of indigenous cultivation of the island. But he also conflates beauty with the good, or in his words the "political good of so fine a settlement" (27).[80] Stedman thus uses aesthetic representation as a justification of imperial

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[78] Stedman's troping of the plantation as a paradisiacal garden was commonplace through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For other readings of this trope, see Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*: *Travel Writing and Transculturation* Iannini's, *Fatal Revolutions*, *Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature.*

[79] See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, for an extensive discussion of the significance of Humboldt's aesthetic orientation towards natural history. Daniel Nemser expands contemporary assessments of Humboldt's aestheticized transformation of empiricism, as I describe below, through a racialized logic of affectability, itself a shifting and recombinatory terrain of hierarchized difference.

[80]On distinctions between liberal and radical modes of aesthetics in the romantic era, see, again, Saree Makdisi, "Blake's metropolitan radicalism," 113-32. Paul Youngquist shares Makdisi's assessment of William Blake as a radical critic of liberalism in his reading of Blake's plates for Stedman's *Narrative*, 75-81.

governance from the outset, through a kind representation that Mary Louise Pratt has deemed "anti-conquest" and that should also remind us of the anthropomorphic logic we saw above. Such aestheticization naturalizes the production of colonial space as always already in excess of subsistence living, as a surplus that pre-exists and enables social use. Here Stedman offers a fiction of primitive accumulation in the way I described it above, making the plantation into the result of nature rather than the product of the domination of humans and nonhumans alike.[81]

Even so, Stedman's *Narrative* regularly shows the limitations of such ideology to always cover over the material ground that it attempts to unite with the "political good" of imperialism. At those times, the *Narrative* mocks the human form by fusing rebellious bodies with the decaying topology of the island. It despoils the feigned passivity of Pratt's anti-conquest narrative by dispossessing life of a naturalized form or naturalizing tendency, in moments that mock the aestheticized nature—namely the very fact of its having been produced. Stedman's allegorical treatment of nature as a garden throws this production, what I referred to above as primitive accumulation, into high relief. That is, it calls attention to artifice as it makes it exchangeable with nature, coding them as a dialectic between the intentional and inherent. This moment, which comes not at the beginning of the *Narrative*, but in Chapter IV demonstrates a peculiar artifice that

[81] William Bartram's *Natural History* provides yet another excellent example of this genre, when he distinguishes the motivation of the natural scientist from the young mechanic he meets searching for [work in the colonies]. Bartram was "continually impelled by a restless spirit of curiosity in pursuit of new productions of nature, my chief happiness consisted in tracing and admiring the infinite power, majesty and perfection of the great Almighty Creator, and in the contemplation, that through divine aid and permission, I might be instrumental in discovering, and introducing into my native country, some original production of nature, which might become useful to society" (48).

represents itself as originary, establishing an equivalence between representation and nature, retroactively scripting origin within a system or order as if it was intentionally, artistically constructed. Stedman's representation, far in advance of Alexander Humboldt's "'aesthetic experience' of tropical nature" (Nemser 161), transforms colonial space into nature as a site of equivalence *through* imitation.

As colonialist writing and scholars of colonialism both document, a physical disfiguration of the Western, anthropocentric human body was frequently associated with plantation life, especially upon the bodies of colonialists. Food, climate and sexual intercourse with slaves and Creoles were all variously cited as a source of physical degeneration by writers including, but certainly not limited to, Stedman, Alexander von Humboldt and Johann Herder. [82] Arguing through Denise di Silva Ferreira's terminology, Daniel Nemser has suggested that such theories of degeneration and environmental susceptibility functioned to differentiate between autonomous, self-regulating bodies and affectable, externally-regulated bodies in eighteenth and nineteenth century infrastructures of race (134-162). But this "affectability" had other, more tenuous traces in colonialists' accounts and in which writing about disfiguration and decay archive rebellion. First was the struggle between Europeans and the natural terrain of colonies, which oftentimes seemed constantly decaying and thus resisted their attempts at mapping,

[82] This theory of degeneration, shared by many natural historians and early physiologists, emerges explicitly throughout Stedman's *Narrative* as a way to account for the many failures and losses of the colonial forces. For instances, Stedman writes early on that "in place of fighting the enemy, we seemed to have come over for nothing else but idle dissipation […] The men are generally a set of poor, withered mortals, as dry and sapless as a squeezed lemon, owing to their intemperate way of living—such as late hours, hard drinking, and particularly too frequent intercourse with the Negro and Mulatto female sex."

navigation and settlement.[83] The second was the struggle between plantation owners and the practice of marronage, in which slaves escaped deeper and deeper into the interior to establish free, hidden communities.

As Monique Allewaert has argued, these two struggles can be seen in the trace of conflation in natural history. In certain texts, slave bodies came to be associated with very terrain into which they disappeared, and a threatening and explicitly nonhuman assemblage was fused into an anti-colonialist force. In contrast to the highly individuated, self-possessed subjectivity that came to be extolled in European narratives of revolution, the traces of an ecological revolution refused the distinction between subject and object and between human and nature. Reading this rhetoric as implicit to William Bartram's natural history writing, she argues that "in the plantation zone, animals, persons, plants, artifacts and their histories, and even land were penetrating, fusing with, transforming one another" in such a way that, at least in the practice of marronage, was recognized "as militant." Thus, Bartram's descriptions of colonial plantations and the decaying effects of surrounding vegetation serve as a reminder that revolution in the colonies threatened not only European powers, but also the Enlightenment divisions between human and nature.

This shifting topography of land and bodies also archives a certain kind of hospitality within what I described as disfiguration above. That is, the collapsing of bodies into decaying nature, like Shelley's "forms of living death," demands a radical accommodation of otherness that is imagined through the disruption of

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[83] As Richard and Sally Price note in their introduction to Stedman, "Marronage plagued the colony from its earliest years, as slave escaped into the rain forest that grew almost up to the doorsteps of the plantations. By the mid-eighteenth century, 'the colony had become the theater of a perpetual war (Nassy 1788, 1:87)'" (xi). On Surinam's "hostility of European bodies" see Elizabeth Bohls, *Slavery and the Politics of Place: Representing the Colonial Caribbean, 1770-1833*, 54-81.

anthropomorphosis, again shifting us back to Shelley's moldering forms with a sense of political possibility inscribed there. This hospitality towards the other, at least as framed through the European binary at the backdrop of Stedman's text, functioned as a strategic weapon in marronage. Stedman, amongst other colonial authors, frequently noted the advantage that slave rebels had during the Maroon Wars because of their intimate knowledge of the land. The threat of slave rebellions was aligned, in some sense, with their becoming-plant or their imitation of vegetable life, a matter of slaves' ability to inhabit the erasure between subjects and landscapes.

Throughout Stedman's *Narrative*, slave rebels' practice of marronage becomes a metonym for Surinam's swampy and moldering landscape. That is, the effects of marronage become coupled with the natural decay of the island such that the Dutch forces are continuously battling, and oftentimes losing, to both. One particularly striking instance of this conflation occurs when Stedman describes the primary task of many slaves, which was to remove weeds that plagued Surinam's sugar plantations in order "to prevent the canes from being impoverished by their luxurious progress" (141). The problem, as Stedman suggests earlier, is that Surinam had incredibly rich and productive "general vegetation," and thus farmers were constantly suppressing the tendency of the land to grow unproductive plants or weeds.[84] For instance, when Stedman arrives he finds that a path "fortified with military posts had been projected and was actually begun from the upper part of the River Commewina till the River Saramacca, but the plan did not

[84] For similar accounts of the difficulties that colonial terrains created for maintaining productive plantations, see the *Edinburgh Review* of Robert Dallas' *History of the Maroons* and Daniel McKinnon's *A Tour of the West Indies*.

take, and [the path] is at present overgrown to a wilderness" (24). Even the military wages war against Surinam's vegetation.

The threat of this internal or natural resistance to the "luxurious progress" of the plantation repeats Stedman's description of the near-apocalyptic destruction of plantations wrought by escaped slaves during the course of the Maroon Wars. If colonial farmers conscripted slaves into battling weeds on their plantations, then those same slaves-turned-rebels are also figured, like Shelley's "monstrous undergrowth," as another natural and almost plant-like enemy. The threat that these escaped rebels posed to the colony was not as "outward enemies" but as "inward ones of a more fierce and desperate nature […] who may with truth be called the terror of this settlement, if not the total loss of it (25).[85] And this enemy, in Stedman's words, was about to "give the finishing blow to the colony of Surinam." Their success was due in large part, as Stedman writes, because the rebels were much better at navigating the "wilderness" and, like weeds, produced greater numbers in the field, whereas colonial soldiers frequently got lost, took ill and died. What Nemser refers to as "affectability" is reversed here, as environmental exposure is taken to be the potential conditions for ending the colony. Surrounding the plantations and acclimated to the environment, rebels and weeds form a powerfully immanent resistance to colonial cultivation. The destruction of colonialism, as Stedman represents it at least, emerges from the destructability of self-determination. Thanks to this allied threat of rebels and their environment to colonial development, Stedman noted

[85] As Richard and Sally Price note in their introduction to Stedman's *Narrative*, the threat of total loss was perhaps more real in Surinam than in other colonies as the ratio of Africans to Europeans at the time was potentially as high as 65:1. In contrast, the contemporary ratio in Jamaica was 10:1. Nonetheless, the actual numbers of rebels against which Stedman was fighting was quite low, possibly in the hundreds.

upon his arrival that, "Surinam is less cultivated than formerly owing to the frequent insurrections of the Negro slaves, who have ruined most of the distant plantations" (141-2).[86]

The undoing of cultivation sounds unintentionally ironic in the wake of Stedman's Edenic description above, admitting at once the active transformation of Surinam into a plantation space while preserving it as natural by designating slave's struggle for freedom as an act of ruin. As Allewaert implies, such ruination is not just the purview of colonial power. The dialectics of colonial enlightenment can itself be treated negatively, as a revelation of radical modes of resistance or, as Roberts has called it, freedom as marronage. Another moment of Stedman's narrative, significantly an instance that appears in translation, underlines a tension between the naturalization of decay in the kinds of assemblages Allewaert describes and the creation through naming that Roberts draws out in his reading of marronage. This tension also emerges in continuity with one I have tracked above in the transition from semblance to Mockery and the difficulty of Shelley's "forms of living death," in the slippage from an epistemological to a political reading of his and Stedman's texts.

Without necessarily solving this tension, I want to conclude this section through a reading of Stedman's curious description of an enormously consequential attack of the Dutch army upon self-emancipated Maroons during the First Maroon War. Stedman relates this event in absentia, as he was not present for the First Maroon War, and in translation. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, one of the key turning

[86]For similar descriptions of the internal threat posed by slave rebellions and the Haitian Revolution in particular, see Anon., "Review of *Crisis in the Sugar Colonies*," *Edinburgh Review*.

points in the First War was the discovery of a key Maroon holdout, a discovery only made possible by slave informants working against the Rebels.

Stedman writes that Boucou "was naturally surrounded by a broad unfordable marsh or swamp which prevented all communication except by private paths under water, known only to Rebels, […] To this spot Baron gave the name of *Boucou, or Moldered, intimating that it should perish in dust before ever it should be taken or even discovered by the Europeans*" (37, emphasis in original). This major rebel settlement had taken so long to locate because it was hidden in the semi-soluble, vegetal landscape that covered much of Surinam and made it all but impenetrable. On the one hand, we can read this passage as a testament to the eternal persistence of Boucou. On the other, the holdout is implied to have an afterlife because it will decay at the first instance of its discovery by colonial forces. The dust of its materiality resists incorporation into the ever-expanding "garden" of plantations. It promises to pass away immediately upon apprehension.

The name of this slave compound mentioned, Boucou, hints at a life cultivated in the crumbling edifice of nature and the undoing of Stedman's earlier anthropomorphic description. Thus, the disfiguration enabled by the Surinamese ecology becomes the condition of possibility for a life beneath or beyond the European plantation, as a part of what Allewaert has called the "plantation zone." Boucou is strong not because of its man-made fortification, but because it was surrounded by the same marsh and swampy terrain that made the island resistant to cultivation. Indeed, the strength of this rebel defense was not its structure, but rather what Stedman describes as its formless and shapeless conformity to the Surinamese land, much of which was covered by "a deep, soft, miry mushy marsh, only covered over with a thin crust of verdure" (205). "Moldered," a word

that is used twice in "The Sensitive Plant" to describe its "forms of living death," is defined by the OED as a slow "decay or disintegration, especially because of neglect." ("Moldered). Boucou's name, which as translated presents it in a *moldered* state and not *potentially moldering*, expresses an impenetrability that results from a symbiotic decay of the human and the island. Such decay is not just an inversion of the imperial perspective that treated plantations as if they were Edenic gardens. Rather, it is like a Shelleyan mockery of the relationship between life and death in which an anti-imperial life persists, ironically, through decay. The shifting ground of Boucou, of Surinam, is a disfiguring force within the rhetorical setting of Stedman's *Narrative*. The force of mockery opens up a space within those disintegrating structures, leaving a gap within colonized nature into which the rebels retreat.[87]

For Shelley mockery suspends life within death, thus disrupting the anthropomorphic ligaments that shaped the early stanzas of his poem into a seemingly sovereign human form. Mockery works to disfigure anthropomorphosis, but it also produces forms through the disruption of its symbiotic aesthetic. Such disruptive construction can be seen here too. In the accounts Stedman gives of marronage, we glimpse figures of life that are animated out of the disfiguration an anthropomorphic form, which I have argued was central to benign characterizations of imperial sovereignty. In both texts, mockery can be seen to work not as some kind of absolute negation, but as a disfiguring trope within aestheticized representations of life, nature,

[87] Here the implications of my reading of marronage perhaps differ from Elizabeth Bohls', who argues that Stedman's "heterogeneous, self-contradictory book […] may have given liberal British readers food for thought" (67) regarding the acceptance of colonialism. In contrast, I am interested in the *Narrative* as a document that threatens to make clear that freedom will only emerge in the termination of identification or sympathy between the colonized and colonizers fostered by a liberal British politics.

and the human. In Stedman, a kind of "ecological revolution," to borrow from Allewaert, mocks colonial power by disfiguring its attempts to make Surinam in its own image.[88] Boucou promises to persist because it is naturally deforming, like the "common clay" and "heap" of Shelley's poem. In contrast to the instrumentalized beauty of Stedman's descriptions of the island as an Edenic garden, Boucou is a material decay that dissolves Stedman's aestheticized Surinam. And yet disfiguration is not wholly destructive. As mockery's playful irony suggests, disfiguration also glimpses an escape route to another life, another mode of animation.

Indeed, as Jord/ana Rosenberg reminds us about the doubled dissection of Marx's method of inquiry into primitive accumulation, a violence that appears in disfigured form, as a form of disfiguration, limns "the monstrously utopian potential of the transformation" of "capital accumulation in its multiplicity of iterations relations as well" (Rosenberg 201). This is to say that Stedman's writing of this crumbling edifice of resistance, which tracks alongside decay as a radical practice, promises what cannot be written by Stedman. Boucou, like the doubled reference of mockery, names a deconstruction in which a construction is also marked through the negation of certainty.

Both *name* a process of erasure. In so doing, they expose origination as a capacity for difference or what Rosenberg calls transformation and multiplicity. The instances index a nonhuman history not as absolute passivity or contingency of the event but as what must be emphasized as the unknowable from a Eurocentric and colonial aestheticization of origins, of nature, of accumulation. The ironic power of Mockery and

[88] Stedman's *Narrative* is certainly not alone in representing a colonial plantation in such an allegorical fashion. As Christopher Iannini notes, Hans Sloane's *Voyage…to Jamaica* demonstrates the extent to which an allegorical or emblematic mode of representing nature supported "the rise of scientific empiricism, mercantile capitalism and liberal individualism," 39.

Boucou destabilize the binaries we know so well from that Eurocentric history. But it is important to say that they do so by promising a construction that is unseen both from the vantage point of Shelley's poem ad Stedman's *Narrative*, and that thus can only be grasped negatively. Reading them as such, these instances of making in destruction shift us from the deconstruction of epistemology into resources of formation.[89] No simple inversions or inscriptions of cyclicality, they locate other forms from within destruction.

Without wanting to downplay the significance of the disruption of Western and colonial epistemologies, such as the binary between human and nonhuman, the living and the mechanical, or the subject and object, that Romantic texts so frequently perform, what I am trying to underline here is that such gestures need to be supplemented with an acknowledgement that such textual disruptions are themselves ambivalent to the core and must be paired with an analysis of how they become, to use Allewaert's term, militant. As Pratt usefully notes, colonialist natural histories themselves hinged on the deployment of a nonmasterful subjectivity that "undertakes to do virtually nothing in the world" (33).[90] The undoing of a sovereign, animated, or Enlightenment subject position is thus not only the purview of a liberatory politics, as Giorgio Agamben's entire body of work has worked to show. Hence my insistence on a doubled reading of Shelley's "forms of

[89] Such naming might be akin to what George Cicciariello-Maher has described in Article 13 of the 1805 Haitian Constitution, which erased whites "from the status of master and from property ownership" and named all Haitians as black—seemingly totalizing or universalizing gestures—while at the same time creating "an exceptional porosity" while exempting "white women and their children, as well as the Poles and Germans who had joined the revolutionary cause" from the legal categorization and exclusion of whites (29).

[90] Nemser extends this observation beyond Pratt's description of anti-conquest as an inactive or unproductive mode of colonialism to include "the structures of care the shaped the practices of colonial governance" that include "the 'love speech' of peaceful colonization, evangelization, and protection [that] generated forms of disposability as well as paternalistic care" (12).

living death," which not only trope the conditions for colonialist capitalism but also negatively trace a form of life outside of it.

What texts like Shelley's, Stedman's, and I would argue those of other Romantic-era writers do so well is to perform the ambivalent capacity, even the usefulness, of the non-essentialized, the non-binarized, the undecidable as it is drawn into the production of life. If, as Nemser argues, affectability is part of neither an entirely fixed or fluid mode of domination, but "is precisely that which determines which bodies are fixed and which are fluid," then it becomes clear that the undoing of classification, binaries and the modes of subjectivity they bring into being is not all that can be at stake in political accounts of literature. But as Roberts' account of marronage also suggests, we must approach liminality and the interstitial not only as a product of imperial and colonial dominance, but as it constitutes a form of struggle and a mode of transformation as not "solely derivative of European discourse or as retreating from struggle" (29). Shelley and Stedman's texts can help to frame a way of approaching such forms as they are unavailable to and even destructive [representation and epistemologies] without giving up on the demand to think their political possibility.[91]

Part IV. Conclusion

Shelley's "forms of living death" and the Surinamese maroon's moldering barricades mock anthropomorphosis. Namely, they mock the configuration of human and

[91] In some sense this might be a way to consider a strain of Romanticism as continuous with Fanon's claim that "Challenging the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of viewpoints. It is not a discourse on the universal, but the impassioned claim by the colonized that their world is fundamentally different" (6).

nature as a relation of sympathy and similitude, the relation that came to characterize sovereignty in the romantic era and British colonialism more generally. In order to conclude with this point, I want to briefly turn to the eponymous plant of Shelley's poem, the Sensitive Plant. That name prompts a consideration about the constellation of subject, sympathy and nature organized by sovereignty in the romantic period.

The Sensitive Plant's taxonomic name, *Mimosa Pudica*, was given directly by Linnaeus when he worked on a Dutch merchant's estate in the 1730s. Mimosa is taken from the Greek *mimos*, meaning to mimic, because it supposedly "mimicked" the feminine act of bashfulness or shamefulness when it folded in on itself upon being touched. From the plot perspective of the poem, this action serves as an analogy between the female gardener and the flower as reciprocal figures of solitary beauty and unrequited love. But from a rhetorical vantage point, mimicry also shows how material differences were wound and bent into a shape of similitude as colonial knowledge was produced.[92]

The gesture of folding for which the *Mimosa* is named is not just a reference to the material responsiveness of the Sensitive Plant. It is also tropological and self-referential, as it makes material features into a metonym for Western, human understanding. The production of scientific knowledge through clear and unmistakable distinctions between individual species thus occurs through the translation of material features into tropes of imitation. Thus the referential function of classificatory names was entirely anthropomorphic, "[endowing] the world with meaning centered around the

[92] Gavin Walker usefully describes this process within primitive accumulation through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of recoding, as a "complex and subtle violence of *creation* in the 'secret' of capitalist development. This process of enclosure is not only the process of expropriation and dispossession but also, and at the same time, it is a process of the cataloging, diagramming, and fixing of singularities into a hierarchized system of classification that is made commensurable—capable of an 'encounter'—but also unequal, hierarchized" (391).

representation of the human."[93] And the *Mimosa* is no exception. Linnaeus recommended that a good classificatory name was one to which the "plant offered its hand," grounding his abstract system of reference on personification.[94] The *Mimosa* thus launches the poem from the beginning through the fiction of similitude between nature and man. That ungrounded and even contingent "discovery" of nature's sympathy with man became the shifting foundation of taxonomic knowledge.

But this fiction of similitude in the poem does not refer us primarily to imperial science, I would argue. Shelley's title, which suggests that a regulatory order might originate with the rhetorical figure of imitation, uses Linnaean classification as an allegory of sovereignty and its reconfiguration throughout the long eighteenth century into what Peter DeGabriele calls "a horizontal social bond in which all are equal in terms of sentiment" (4). DeGabriele argues that sovereignty came to be understood throughout the eighteenth century as the effect of a "series of reflections that make pleasure and satisfaction mutual and reciprocal" and that "is supposed to bring two distant bodies into a reciprocal relation" (4,1). Such an anthropomorphic mode of sovereignty displaced hierarchical order and absolutes in favor of a world that was an aesthetic reflection of man.[95] But Shelley and Stedman show that what DeGabriele calls "sympathy with the sovereign" does not only structure relations between human subjects. Nature, ranging from the discrete flower to an entire island, also becomes an expression of the sovereign "pleasure and satisfaction" established between reciprocal bodies.

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[93] Barbara Johnson, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010).
[94] For more on the erasure of indigenous names through the expansion of Western classificatory systems, see Londa L. Schiebinger., *Plants and Empire : Colonial Bioprospecting In the Atlantic World.*
[95] Carl Schmitt dismisses what he calls "political romanticism" for precisely this reason. See *Political Romanticism*.

And yet this only reinforces the error of identification that is bound up so tightly in Shelley's classificatory title that, once read, feels like it might explode. The tensions of that fiction also pulse in Stedman's descriptions of Surinam, which variously appears as aesthetic perfection, identified with man, and topographic destruction, identified with slaves. The sympathetic bonds of sovereignty there crack open into "the blind domination characteristic of the sovereign relation […] displaced into the relation between the domestic and the colonial" in a disfiguration of mimesis and sympathy that spreads across bodies and landscapes (12).[96] This anthropomorphic sovereignty, which is to say a sovereignty reflected in an aestheticized nature, accounts for the contradictory logic by which colonialists like Stedman could advocate for the "political good" of a colony as "fine" as Surinam, even for slaves, while simultaneously describing the horrors of slavery as a practice. This logic turns out to be not so much contradictory as it is distributed and differentially spatialized in a European arc of equivalence. As Nemser argues, the concentration of sovereign domination in European law, one half of DeGabriele's reciprocal or sympathetic sovereignty, can only be understood alongside its spatialization in the colonies: "the production of this 'internal' stability [of the *just publicum*] depended on the displacement of war to Europe's constitutive outsides, namely colonial space. Deemed juridically empty, this space 'beyond the line' became available for occupation and was constituted as a zone where the only law was force" (15).

[96] Nemser extends this qualitative distinction of sovereignty as it operated in the colonies through Agamben, writing that "the production of this 'internal' stability [of the *just publicum*] depended on the displacement of war to Europe's constitutive outsides, namely colonial space. Deemed juridically empty, this space 'beyond the line' became available for occupation and was constituted as a zone where the only law was force" (15).

But here we can return to the political function of Shelley's notion of mockery contra sympathy. His first subtle use of mockery, in the passage on Consciousness, showed us that sympathy is accomplished only through a misreading of the mechanism that produced its appearance. It was not Consciousness above, but figurative language. But in the culminating narrative stanza of the poem, mockery explicitly undoes that appearance again. Shelley turns directly to the man condemned to death, the exemplary subject of sovereignty, and to a final destruction of sympathy between human and nature. He writes of his "agarics and fungi with mildew and mould" that:

> Their moss rotted off them, flake by flake
> Till the thick stalk stuck like a murderer's stake,
> Where rags of loose flesh yet tremble on high
> Infecting the winds that wander by (III: 66-69)

As Donald Reiman's and Neil Freistat's footnote to this stanza suggests, Shelley is referring directly to the particularly horrific punishment of the gibbet, "a sort of gallows on which the body of a criminal executed for a particularly heinous crime was, by order of the sentencing judge, chained to an iron frame near the scene of the crime as a warning to others. Its use was legal only from 1752 to 1834" (Reiman and Fraistat, 293n). Here sympathy shows its disjunctive relation to bare life as anthropomorphosis breaks down in order to affirm the law. If sovereignty came to appear as the product of sympathy between the human and nature in the romantic period, then here Shelley asks us to witness, again, the decay of that relation in the stark image of flesh that seems neither

human nor nonhuman.[97] But the results of the application of sovereign power, what DeGabriele called its "blind domination characteristic", are not what we might expect from this scene of torture. In contrast to what Mario Klarer has called the "humanitarian pornography" of Stedman's scenes of slave torture, the destruction of the nonhuman that we witness here repels the possibility of "empathy or sentiment" that ultimately reinforces the identity of the viewer through "spectatorial sympathy."[98] Bare life does not produce the security of sovereignty but rather Shelley's "forms of living death," which mock the firm hold of anthropomorphosis. The cognitive disruption between Consciousness and Nature that we read above here poses an explicit limit to understanding. Mockery disfigures and upends any relation between life and death, human and nature, that would affirm our conscious hold over it, enacting the philosophical principle Shelley poses at the end of his poem.

Like Boucou's mockery of the hold of colonial power through decomposition, Shelley's undoing of the human form into plant matter produces a different politics of living on. At the end of Part Three the mimetic relation of the human and nature turns over into mockery.[99] Nature as plant here does not imitate the human, it does not fold into a semblance of unity with it. That process is reversed and counterfeited. The semblance

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[97] Shelley's reference to decaying and infecting skin produces yet another affinity with Stedman's *Narrative*. As Emily Senior has recently argued, Stedman was concerned with diseased and porous skin throughout the *Narrative,* where it serve as a conflicted marker of racial distinctions and textual integrity alike. See "'Perfectly Whole": Skin and Text in John Gabriel Stedman's Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam."

[98] Mario Klarer, "Humanitarian Pornography: John Gabriel Stedman's 'Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam' (1796)." On suffering, death and sentimentality as a genre in the *Narrative*, see also Tassie Gwilliam, "Scenes of Horror, Scenes of Sensibility Stedman's 'Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam'."

[99] Mimicry does not only mean imitation or copying, but also, like mockery, refers to an imitation for the "purposes of ridicule or satire."

of sympathy turns into a decaying human form, a "shadow of a dream" of life at end of colonialism. These disintegrating forms live on through a contamination of everything around them, by "infecting the winds that wander by." There is an explicit analogy here with the language of infection and contagion of humanity used to describe slave revolts in the colonies and to support arguments against freeing slave territories. For instance, an 1802 *Edinburgh Review* of *Crisis in the Sugar Colonies* noted that if France were to allow for a free St. Domingo, it would produce a "contagion of example" that "generally excites communities similarly circumstanced" and would lead to a "rapid extermination of the whites." Contagion haunts both Shelley and Stedman's texts as the possibility of a life that is reproduced from within anthropomorphic unity and through its decay.[100] And it reminds us that the form of life typically identifies with a sovereign, rights-bearing subjects should not be hastily identified with forms of life that have been created in struggles for a different kind of freedom. Shelley's garden and its "monstrous undergrowth" and Stedman's plantation and the free bodies of former slaves refuse identification with such subjects, but without becoming abandoned to sovereignty's particular power of death. In Shelley's stanzas and the moldering physio-landscapes of Surinam there emerges another language of life than that of an anthropomorphic sovereignty, threatening not because it reminds us of an existential condition of decaying bodies but because it points to a life that persists by escaping into it. Mockery points us to the life offered in marronage.

[100] Contagion becomes all the more threatening in the context of nineteenth century science's reassessment of the skin, and thus the body, as pervious and porous rather than protective and integument. See Senior, 42-44.

As I have been trying to show, the outcome of a rhetorical reading of these texts is not an improved version of sovereignty or a positive counterpoint of history that can be cited, but rather a poetic insistence on a figure of life that emerges in its destruction. [101] Mockery, with its unstable double speak, gives a figure of life and death that is at once semblance and "creed," full of levity and capable of irony's cutting force. Mockery is both as an "action or speech; action or habit of mocking others" and "an absurdity, something which one cannot take seriously." It forges an affinity between political practice and what Sara Guyer calls the "unresolved experience of the relation of life to poetry" (*Reading* 39). I have read mockery and marronage together, in a chiasmic relation of rhetoric and politics, in order to consider the significance of romanticism's resistance to identifying life with a certain kind of politics of bare life. What Shelley calls mockery can help us think through a poetic politics that resists reinscribing the traditional terms of romantic revolution like the subject, recognition and, ultimately, sovereignty. But read together, Shelley's poem and Stedman's *Narrative* help us to rethink our narratives of political action in the romantic period, shifting our gaze from revolution and identity to *marronage* and mockery.

[101] On destruction and sovereign power, see Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence", *Reflections*: *Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* and Werner Hamacher, "Affomative, Strike: Walter Benjamin's Critique of Violence", *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Exeperience*.

A Poetic Prescription: Giacomo Leopardi's "La Ginestra" as a Cure for History

Nietzsche's argument in favor of a history that ought to be useful for and in the service of life in "History in the Service and Disservice of Life" was posited against a nostalgic orientation towards a past that "understands merely how to *preserve* life, not how to create life" (102). His antidote to that cultural disease, a radically presentist version of history, was informed by the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi, who Nietzsche called "the modern ideal of a classicist" ("We Philologists" 331). For Nietzsche, Leopardi's philosophy of history resisted the beleaguering effects its idealization. In this chapter, I want to suggest that in Leopardi's most famous poem, "La Ginestra," the history against which nostalgia Nietzsche cautions gets doubled in a preservationist and curative mode.

Nostalgia in Nietzsche's sense is a preeminently progressive and linear mode of time in which what is mourned is what is cut off from the present and the future—in other words, an atemporal time. Nostalgic preservation is akin to the problem of traumatic mourning as Rebecca Comay has described it, as the displacement of temporal disorientation into "a buried past or a distant future" (25). Comay elaborates nostalgia as a compounded trauma that refuses trauma as constitutive of historical experience. Nostalgia, then, is not a condition to be overcome but a structuring principle of history. It is this materialist engagement with nostalgia that I read here in Leopardi's late poem "La Ginestra," which writes it as both a mode of preservation and of temporal disruption. Towards the end of this chapter I turn to consider such temporal disruption not as traumatic but as curative, as figured by the namesake plant of the poem.

After all, “La Ginestra” (“The Broom Plant”) was frequently prescribed as a purgative in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such purgatives function in an autoimmune fashion, producing convulsions to heal bodies. Troping trauma, purgatives work by incorporating disruption into experience rather than making them into aberrations. While the curative function of the plant is never directly referenced by the poem, I am interested in how this embedded reference to purgation, however accidental it might be, proposes a counter-dialectic to one of loss and preservation often read into Leopardi and Romantic poetry more generally. I argue that what may appear contingent in this poetic connection between the broom plant and the purgative is exemplary of Leopardi’s larger poetry and philosophy, in which materialism is frequently used as a remedy for the monumentalizing work of history and, as I will argue, the cultural politics of nationalism. I conclude by arguing that the broom plant is at once an as an image of disrupted temporality and a figure of life. Rather than sequester loss as an origin point that is dually preserved from the present and preserves the present as a site of resolute acceptance of terminable loss, Leopardi shows the past and present to be inescapably exposed to one another. But this exposure, or destruction of preservation, is what makes the ground upon which Leopardi’s figure for life, in the Broom Plant, survives.

I. Prolegomena: Romantic Temporality and Riotous Life

The history of Leopardi’s poetry in English translation is itself a discontinuous one. He certainly was almost entirely unknown to British Romantic writers, and was only introduced to a British reading public during the Victorian period, albeit in a fragmentary

fashion after his dissection by Victorian sensibilities wary of his materialism.[102] Dissected and displaced, he became for the Victorians a poet who transcended nationality. But in his own writing, Leopardi affirmed the difference of Italian literature from continental Romanticism. According to him, Romantic literature was mistakenly attached to a mode of the Imagination that was only available to the classical poets. When Leopardi wrote that modernity does not have literature, he was thinking mainly of Romantic literature, which was identified around the very same time by Coleridge in its best forms as a literature of the Imagination. Leopardi counters that, "Imagination […] is not appropriate for modern times, and as a matter of fact is even inappropriate" [1174]. Against Victorian sensibilities, Leopardi has often been read by contemporary critics as thinker closes to an eighteenth-century tradition of French materialism. Such competing versions of Leopardi create a dialectic between Romantic transcendence and Enlightenment materialism, from which emerges a narrative of complete autonomy on one side and determinist mechanism on the other. Such narratives preserve Leopardi for history, on through an autonomy severed from the material world and the other through a mechanism gives itself over to unchangeable fate.

I think that Leopardi's poetry gives us reason to think history differently, namely in a metaleptic mode in which time is ever-exposed to destruction. Although I will rely primarily on "La Ginestra" below, one of Leopardi's earlier poems offers a remarkable instance of the destructive temporality that makes him such a compelling figure for Romanticism. In one of his earliest poems, bearing the Keatsian title "To Angelo Mai On

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[102] See Ottavio M. Casale and Allan C. Dooley's "Leopardi, Arnold, and the Victorian Sensibility."

His Finding the Manuscript of Cicero's De republica," he offers an entwinement of past and present. There he writes:

Where have they gone, our happy dreams	Nostri sogni leggiadri ove son giti
of the exotic homelands	Dell'ignoto ricetto
of exotic peoples, or the stars diurnal	D'ignoti abitatori, o del diurno
resting place, or young Aurora's distant bed,	Degli astri albergo, e del rimoto letto
or the hidden sleep of the great planet?	Della giovane Aurora, e del notturno
Look, they vanished in a moment,	Occulto sonno del maggior pianeta?
and the world's described on one brief page;	Ecco svaniro a un punto,
look, now everything's the same,	E figurato è il mondo in breve carta;
and discovery only adds to nothingness.	Ecco tutto è simile, e discoprendo,
Truth is taken from us	Solo il nulla s'accresce. A noi ti vieta
in the moment it arrives (91-101)[103]	Il vero appena è giunto,

In this stanza, the past is neither a Romantic symbol nor an Enlightenment recollection. Instead it is given as a figure of transience or precarity, available because it risks disappearance. Here, an address to the past turns into the vanishing of the moment, world becomes page, discovery becomes nothingness, and truth is withdrawn at the instance of its arrival. This figurative presentation of loss frees the past from chronology while opening it up to disappearance. If what was lost cannot be cited, as Benjamin wrote, "as

[103] Here I rely on Jonathan Galassi's recent and somewhat controversial translation of the *Canti*, while also attending to important discrepancies that occur in his translation throughout.

the way it really was" then these allegories of the past are not references to a time that has been lost but rather to the figurative nature of recollection and the way that language is bound up with recollection. This means that what was lost is not what is preserved outside of the language in which it arrives, a point that Leopardi will make in the *Zibaldone* and that I discuss below. Here its dual arrival and destruction is given as a figures and as a command. Leopardi's repeated apostrophic dictate to "Look" ("Ecco") constellates past and present, that induces the instant in which truth arrives. This moment of looking and arrival is also the instance of disappearance, where "vanish" seems like an echo of "Ecco." The poetic demand to retrieve draws what had been figured as chronologically prior into "a moment" in which it disappears in the present. History as truth is distinctly what does not endure; what lasts is what fades into redundancy. The past is given in figures in the present, staging the impossibility of citing what came before in a chronological and resolved way. This discontinuous sense of such time opens out to a temporality that it is punctuated and strung together in a chain of occurrences whose wounds remain as the gaps of retrieval. In other words, they give possibility and apprehension through what is discontinuous and disorienting. Leopardi shows time to be subject to loss, not to be the product of a time before loss. The apprehension of the past appears as a moment of truth and disappearance, which moves the past inside rather than outside of the time of loss.

This structure of time is a metaleptic one, in the sense that metalepsis undoes the binary relation of chronological order and substitutes "before for after, early for late, outside for inside, cause for effect, without regard for their truth structure" (*Allegories* 108). Metalepsis suspends the logic of causality, wreaking havoc by replacing truth with

trope. It effectively demonstrates a mode of linguistic understanding that neutralizes contradiction independent of truth. In other words, it enables cognition by abandoning metaphysics; it enables the movement of thought by emptying out the possibility that objective accounts could produce knowledge. While Paul de Man was interested in this trope because it pointed to the essentially nonchronological structure of cognition, it seems most useful to me as a way of reading Leopardi because of the way it intimates disruption and abstraction. That is, it makes possible the bringing together of the past and the present, the outside inside in such a way that another, nonchronological time can be thought, but it does so by risking a contaminated relation between the two. Thus as we see above, Leopardi's sense of history above arrives in a moment ("un punto") and immediately becomes redundant description ("tutto è simile"), realizing truth in the vanishing of its allegorical figuration at the same time that it is reduced to the nothingness of sameness.

This stanza initiates Leopardi's larger presentation of history as I understand it, one in which nostalgia is not melancholy for a past cut off from the present but perhaps a name for the constitutive loss felt within time. Already in this definition we can see the destructive torsion of time cuts into the present. Anna Kornbluh extends de Man's definition into this more dialectical implication, writing that metalepsis produces "Undecidable formations of retroactivity [and] paradoxes that propel narrative's continuous leaps over the contradictions that are its object" (131).[104] As Kornbluh makes clear, metalepsis is no simple trope of equality or synthesis, one in which differences are

[104] Leopardi also celebrates this mode of recollection as the possibility of poetry: "A man with a strong and vivid imagination […] sees relationships, passes rapidly from one proposition to another, understands the links so vividly and easily and amasses in a moment so many syllogisms so well linked and ordered and so clearly conceived *that he leaps the centuries*" (Bini 141).

made into similarities. Rather, metalepsis ensures the movement through the time of narration, recollection, etc. is made possible through the negation of continuity. This disruption of chronology prompts narration's attempts at smoothing over what it cannot fully cover over. Metalepsis thus induces a problem that it does not solve, like Leopardi's demand to look, making the loss of linearity into a compensation for it. Metalepsis is both figure of disappearance, when "truth is taken from us in the moment it arrives," and of substitution that leaps across different registers: from spatialized allegory (Where have they gone) to performative instantaneity (Look, they vanished in moment) to aphorism (Truth is taken from us). The absence or loss of metalepsis is built into apprehension as that "gap between sign and meaning, as the inner space of language" (Genette qtd. in Fischlin 174). Leopardi's passage above bears these gaps throughout the stanza where history is structured as a figure of movement through them, making it impossible to entirely suture or separate one moment and another.

This is not the temporality through which Leopardi's writing is most often read. Indeed, Leopardi's sense of loss has been made into the limit that the aesthetic overcomes. Which is to say that the temporality most often associated with Leopardi is a preservationist one in which the aesthetic fills the gap between the material and the phenomenal. That is to say that Leopardi's well-known melancholy and nostalgia names an orientation towards loss in which some version of holistic and continuous time is preserved as the antecedent to our own, in a "uniform and continuous time frame from which we take the measure of delay" (6). [105] Such readings tend to displace Leopardi's

[105] The clearest example of such a reading can be found in one of the only texts in English dedicated entirely to Leopardi, G. Singh's *Leopardi and the Theory of Poetry*, which argues that Leopardi's notion of melancholy was a creative, rather than an immobilizing one. Nonetheless,

well-known critique of humanist transcendence into a disavowal in which critique preserves a desire for what is no longer available. Even those most attentive to the singularity of Leopardi's materialism translate it into such idealism, in which aesthetic production overcompensates for the loss of the past. Thus, Nicolas Gardini writes that Leopardi's early passion for philology produced in him a lifetime "[attempt] to restore some ideal form" resurrected from the past (78). And Daniela Bini states that it is the "insufficiency of reality, its lack of purposes" that allowed Leopardi "to create his own meaningful world, and in doing so [to manifest] his superiority over nature" (15). Here a familiar Romantic binary of material and immaterial, nature and culture is at the heart of Leopardi's writing. The past becomes a corpse of unity—a preserved sovereignty—that is to be restored only in the imagination, where the insufficiencies of the material world are overcome by creative faculties.

This preservationist imagination is deeply wedded to the politics of nationalism in Italian Romanticism. Such nationalism is the political form of a temporally fallen condition, one that divides the failures of this historical from what is possible in the aesthetic or cultural. While this chapter will not directly engage with the development of Italy as a unified nation and the complicated histories of the *Risorgimento*, it is worth briefly noting here that criticism that situates Leopardi through the national question tends to reproduce this distinction between the material and the aesthetic, where the latter both negates and transcends the historical. The nation becomes the political analogue to the imagination, both of which substitute for what can no longer be realized in a temporal

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Singh's temporal schema still divides the past from the present in an absolute way, making the present into a marker of limits that can only be overcome in the imagination.

condition.[106] What is beyond or in excess of material life—a version of mere life—becomes the substrate of national unity.[107]

Readers of Leopardi are not insensitive to the immaterial and ghostly life that gets mobilized by such narratives of pastness. Recent arguments made by Paul Hamilton and Joseph Luzzi about Leopardi's poetry, and that of Italian Romanticism more generally, addresses the displacement of the politics project of nationalism onto a cultural register. Their notions of fictiveness operate with a distinctly Gadamerian spirit, through which the aesthetic refers to the recovery of an "unrepeatable past" only in a symbolic or interpretive mode that is, by definition, autonomous from the world of loss.[108] Hamilton's presentation of Leopardi as a cosmopolitan poet writing post-revolution follows this line

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[106] The critical tradition that has perhaps contributed most to a different assessment of temporality in the formation of nation states, one in which discontinuity and dissonance is not a peripheral but a central motor of state formation, it is the postcolonial and subaltern analysis that comes out of Gramsci's reading of the *Risorgimento*. That analysis shows state formation to be a product not of fully realized totality but rather of differential and contradictory interests bartered between the economic and the social. Chatterjee makes this explicit in defining bourgeois hegemony outside in largely agrarian and non-industrialized states as "necessarily […] incomplete and fragmented" (44). The incomplete and fragmentary are not the limits to but are the conditions of state formation in this analysis. While still often idealizing, Gramsci's notion of hegemony is helpful inasmuch as it shows the fragmentary to be a productive condition, thus provoking different questions about the separation of the material and ideological in theories of poetic idealization, one not about the past but about its utilization for the purposes of hegemony in the present, even perhaps as a retroactive effect of state formation more generally. This notion of unity as ideological effect of the discontinuous and untimely is also implied in Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*.

[107] As certain theorists of of biopower have argued, this generalization also exposes discrete forms of life to new modes of violence in the name of preserving the life of the nation. See Roberto Esposito, *Bios*.

[108] See Gadamer's "The relevance of the beautiful" where he argues that the political function of art is to represent an ideal or Idea that will manifest in the world through interpretation and communication. Hamilton's notion of the surplus of the imagination, the necessary incompletion of material manifestation, and his investment in communication and the public sphere as the politics of aesthetics repeat this Gadamerian phenomenology. For Gadamer, like Hamilton, the effects of the aesthetic are entirely representational. Hamilton's argument for an aesthetics that is completely separated from but nonetheless mysteriously affects political institutions seems particularly aligned with Gadamer's interpretation of the function of free play within political communities. This mode of politico-aesthetic interpretation is precisely what Agamben critiques as the post-Aristotelian structure of primary and secondary mover.

closely. For him, Leopardi's poetry was part of the passive revolution of continental romanticism, in which an "ideal republic" substitutes "in response to what we cannot change" (196).[109] The political function of Leopardi's imagination is to be found in a distinctly immaterial, cultural production in which the "comprehensiveness of imagined accommodations of human variety grew more provocative as their ideal authority or distance from *actually* substituting for political institution increased" (27). Poetry and aesthetics, which Hamilton uses interchangeably, constructed an ideal unity in the civil sphere of letters and discourse that produced a "common ground lying behind different points of view" and an "interplay of differences musically [establishing] the new harmony" in a fiction that does not and cannot operate upon material life (4).[110] Italy's nonexistence as a nation—its status as a fiction by which its inability to keep up with the present was indexed—was thus exemplary rather than exceptional, as it yielded a national language of identity and "like mindedness" (5) to orient what is unrealized in practice.[111] Joseph Luzzi's approach to the political significance of Italy on a European landscape is

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[109] Hamilton clearly invokes a Gramscian language throughout his reading of Leopardi, but tends to convert the idea of passive revolution into an entirely aesthetic theory rather than a political project aimed at hegemony and the consolidation of power.

[110] Here it might be relevant to compare Hamlton's description of such imagined unity to what Gramsci describes as the production of hegemony in the State, specifically in the context of long process of the Italian *Risorgimento* during which, much like the context of the Vienna Treaty, the "progress" of nationalism seemed materially elusive. Where Hamilton considers the political function of the imagination as largely autonomous from the production of political power, Gramsci clearly understands them as an inseparable "struggle [that] rages not on a corporate but on a 'universal' plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups. It is true that the State is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the 'national' energies" (Gramsci cited in Chatterjee 44).

[111] For configurations of fiction and law that diverge from Hamilton's preservation of the fictive from what exists either institutionally or politically, one might consult Giorgio Agamben's account of inoperativity, Paul de Man's reading of Rousseau's social contract as a constitutive fiction or Jacques Derrida's claim that literature and law share a production of nonexistent origin.

more ambivalent on the relation between nation-state formation and poetry. But he also reads Italian Romanticism as an active participant in cultivating a mythical nationalism predicated entirely on what was lost to the past and which seems to have little claim on the present. He argues that Italy's status as a "geographic expression" serves as the ideal to which citizens of European nation-states anxiously cast their gaze. Italy's presence as cultural and imagined artifact made it an ideological precondition of other nations, offering up a location to fulfill the "abiding desire to return to cultural homelands that never existed" (21). Italian poets did this too, as they "sought to reconcile tradition with innovation by planting the seeds of the future Italy in the soil of its past, thereby honoring the lost cultural forms and deceased exemplars of a putative Italian spirit that trumped centuries of political fragmentation" (cite). This notion of the past as what is both preserved but inaccessible, lost and nonexistent compounds the historical trauma that Comay describes, in which an event—here we might say the constitutive failure that is the nation—is "at once acknowledged and disavowed" (25). In other words, it mystifies through a historical dualism that promises redemption by rejecting time.

Even as they subject the nation to criticism, such arguments understand a nostalgic poetics to be identical to the nostalgia through which nationalism operates, in which loss presupposes a restoration that, by definition, *cannot take place in history*. The problem with such readings of Leopardi's latent nationalism, even cosmopolitanism that is staked on the failure of the nation-state, is that they translate what has been irremediably lost into the recovery of the aesthetic; the past is truly, absolutely lost and what can be recovered is what transcends history, propelled forward by the debris piling up behind it. This seems to me to repeat the dualist logic of sovereignty underlying

nationalism and to affirm it as a transcendent form effected primarily in culture and language. Concomitantly, the form of life that emerges alongside this political imagination operates by "[promising] citizens abstract immortality" (Luzzi 38) and sublating material differences in a "republic of letters" aimed at an "ideal republic" (Hamilton 27). Such accounts of Italian Romanticism divide *and* preserve a nonexistent unity, whether lost to the past or projected onto the future, from a present that is sealed off from both. Staking the politics of Romanticism on an atemporal desire for the nonexistent, such nostalgia affirms a life that is only in immaterial form.[112] While this may actually be a helpful way to understand one aspect of nation, as the necropolitical producer of an abstracted or mere life, it makes any insights beyond the ideological story the nation tells about itself, or into simultaneous transformations of material life that dialectically inform it, obscure to the grasp of poetics that remains within the realm of an immaterial imagination.

In contrast to this series of substitutions in which the nation becomes simultaneously immaterial and fated, I hope to show that a distinctly anti-nationalist time is at work in Leopardi's poetry. Which is to say that there is a distinctly materialist time that unworks the idealization of the nation in Leopardi. It is not what is beyond the limitations of the material that guarantees a political form, as Hamilton and Luzzi perhaps

[112] Luzzi is not necessarily critical of this nostalgic and immaterial production of the nation. Indeed, he seems to be most interested in placing Italy at the center of nation-state ideology because Italy herself was lacking a nation. Thus, his sense that Foscolo "must chart the future with the maps of a transcendental cultural patrimony" (cite) for Italy not a disparaging one but one that he seeks to compare to the ideological work of other romantic poets he identifies as important national poets, like Wordsworth. Margaret Brose also reads Foscolo as a poet who utilized mourning as "constitutive of this new political consciousness" of "nation, citizen and individual self" (2), although she casts mourning as an agentic site through which a more feminine notion of citizen and individual self could be incorporated into the nation.

suggest, but rather what is "at the outer limits of matter" but "entirely within the boundaries of matter" [King *Zibaldone* 1025] that makes for a political horizon. Leopardi's unique materialism draws out what is at the outer limits not just in the form of matter, but also in what forms our desire for a politics takes. This peculiar conjuncture of the outer that is entirely within insists not on the divisibility of materiality and what can be imagined outside of it but on a rigorous dialectic in which what is at the limit of material form yields the necessity of its being some other way.[113] In contrast to a nationalist poetics in which limits mark the difference between the transcendental and the material, Leopardi's poetry internalizes limits as the condition of matter. In what follows I try to account for this version of the limit along the lines of metalepsis, as that interior gap between truth and cognition as one that can be written in a non-preservationist mode.

Here I am concerned with a politics of time in Leopardi. Such a politics that limits internal to materiality demands a destruction within—not relegated to the past—of time. In other words, this is a time in which life and time become intimately tied together in the destruction of their separation. Leopardi's looking gives the past through its undoing in the instance of looking, keeping the present "entirely within the boundaries of matter instead of making it the catalyst for an immaterial recuperation. Indeed, Leopardi is an interesting figure for my dissertation in that readings of him underline the difficulty of resisting philosophies of history that are not subsumed by the progressive and determined. What seems most relevant about Leopardi for our contemporary moment is

[113] See Leopardi's own "Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica" for his response to Madame de Stael's critique of Italian literature and of a sentimentalist era of romanticism. For his alignment with French materialism, see Daniela Bini's *Flower of the Desert*; Sebastiano Timpanaro's "The Pessimistic Materialism of Giacomo Leopardi;" Michael Caesar's "Leopardi and The Knowledge of the Body."

his constitutively non-linear time. His immanentization of decline, not as a separated origin point but as a continual fragmenting of the past into the present, suggests how livable loss is. But the loss of nonlinear time becomes a resource of life in his poetry. Perhaps most significantly in relation to the operative terms of this project, Leopardi's sense of materiality at its limit suggests that we need to approach a politics of time not through a cultural or poetic preservation but through the destruction of continuous time. In this chapter, riotous life indexes a temporality of what Benjamin might have described as a fatedness that is without linearity or telos, a kind of necessity grasped only in its undoing. Leopardi's turning towards such a notion of time echoes Comay's description of history as a constitutive experience of lateness, missed experience, and anachronism, instead of as a chronology of loss that divides the fallen present from the fullness of the past (1-14).[114] Similarly, in Leopardi the lost, the lapsed and the ruined not as a temporal origin point from which chronology is launched, but as the possibility of history itself—what is felt as loss is *internal* to rather than *behind* the historical.

II. *Poetic Images: Flower, Reflection, Pain*

[114] This lateness of history is most clearly articulated for Comay in responses by the German Romantics, Kant and finally Hegel, who at once recognized and immunized themselves from the significance of the French Revolution and its continual reminder of their own unrealized rupture. Comay treats the German reception of the French Revolution as exemplary of, rather than an exception to, history in which "The clocks are never synchronized, the schedules never coordinated, every epoch is a discordant mix of divergent rhythms, unequal durations, and variable speeds" (4). This traumatic nature of history is not to be avoided or repressed in her account, but taken as constitutive, because the alternative temporality of continuity and an absence of trauma leads to investments in aesthetic freedom, disavowals of a present structured through loss and discontinuity, and a mode of translation that "(masks) the violence of conquest" (16).

"La Ginestra, o fiore del deserto" puts such loss to curative use. "La Ginestra" was Leopardi's last poem, written and completed in 1836 but not published until 1845. It is one of Leopardi's longest, divided into four distinct stanzas and 317 lines long. A poem that is recognized for its thematization of destruction (of the Roman Empire, of Pompeii by Vesuvius, of human progress and perhaps even humankind), I want to argue that it is also a poem that erodes the distance between destruction and its representation. Epic in its survey of centuries from lost empire to an unnamed present, it names the broom plant as survivor of mankind but also concludes with a prophecy of its mortal demise, refusing to symbolize or transcendentalize the flower. The first lines read:

Here on the dry flank	Qui su l'arida schiena
of the terrifying mountain	Del formidabil monte
Vesuvius the destroyer,	Sterminator Vesevo,
which no other tree or flower brightens,	La qual null'altro allegra arbor ne fiore,
you spread your solitary thickets,	Tuoi cespi solitary intorno spargi,
scented broom,	Odorato ginestra,
at home in the desert. And I've seen your	Contenta dei deserti. Anco ti vidi
shoots	De' tuoi steli abbellir l'erme contrade
embellishing the lonely plain	Che cingon la cittade
around the city	La qual fu donna de'mortali un tempo
that once was mistress of men,	E del perduto impero
and whose grave and silent aspect	Par che col grave e taciturno aspetto
seems to bear witness, telling the traveler	Faccian fede e ricordo al passaggero.

of her lost empire.	Or ti riveggo in questo suol, di tristi
Now I see you here again,	Lochi e dal mondo addandonati amante,
lover of sad places that the world has left	E d'afflitte fortune ognor compagna.
and constant friend of fallen greatness.	
(1-16)	

The poem begins with a similarly quasi-ekphrastic and performative gesture of looking that we saw in "Ad Angelo." Unlike "Ecco" above, which implies an address to someone or something, "Qui" is more locative and topographic than it is apostrophic. It is more spatializing than temporalizing. Nonetheless, both immanentize the act of looking with an enacting of loss. And as we move into the first few lines, Leopardi intermingles the spatializing "Qui" with the rhetorical "Ecco," rapidly jumping from location to a veiled address to the broom. The gesture of looking it enacts, which continues to operate throughout the poem, both spatializes decline through ruin-populated landscapes *and* temporalizes our access to them through a rhetorical address that constellate multiple modes of time. What we are asked to look at is not there. Rather, the act of looking makes time discontinuous.

These first lines displace us from a location (Vesuvius) into an indirect address through the broom plant (And I've seen), moving us from the poet's view of a destroyed, embellished landscape and onto a catachrestic speech of silence ("whose grave and silent

aspect/seems to bear witness, telling the traveler). Wrought through paradox –like a truth that vanishes—speech enacts silence. Barbara Johnson has noted that such instances of failed voice in inanimate things take on a generally epitaphic function in the Romantic lyric, in which "the fiction of life" is used to "animate a corpse and have it speak." This necromancy gives poetry "access to [the poet's] living voice, even though the individual author may have been buried for more than two hundred years" (14). But Leopardi's poem begins with a clearly epitaphic failure of speech, launching itself with the frozen image of the plant. After all, here inscribed stone is not figured with a mouth made for speech, but rather a living thing is converted into the stoniness of a "grave and silent aspect." While the various substitutions of figure that ensue from the "Here" provide a descriptive and cognitive landscape for us as readers, the performative function of the "Here" disrupts the continuity of retrieval. Another way to say this is that the stony image of the broom resists a vocative figure that would redeem its silence through narration of past loss or destruction, thus demanding that its time instead be in the here and now, converting the command to look into a destruction of certainty rather than the certainty of past destruction. In contrast to Johnson's reading of lyric poetry, it seems that Leopardi *begins* with a clear disclaimer that recovery is impossible. This scene opens metaleptically, disrupting the externalization of history from the act of recounting without collapsing them into a recuperative voice. The thematization of speech through address ("I've seen your/ Now I see you here") demarcates a loss, not of the past but of an interval internal to the present. This distinction makes Leopardi a peculiar Romantic for whom the recuperation of voice is not a primary task. In this opening stanza, Leopardi faces the problem of a resolutely silent stone, with "grave and silent aspect." The

substitutions in this passage do not produce a voice that preserves empire for the present, but rather diverts directly into a stoic, silent interval in which "ti vidi" arrives again as "Or ti riveggo." ("I've seen your/ Now I see you here").

The mediated reference of the loss of empire, comes in the middle of the iteration of address I already noted ("I've seen/I see"). This mediation literally dislocates historical loss in the middle of two different points in time. Indeed, what seems most explicitly disturbed in the opening passage is the unaccounted time installed by Leopardi's two instances of resisted address: I've seen/ once was/ Now I see/ constant friend. The difference between then and now seems to subsume the decline of empire within this present time of address. Destruction may at first seem to apply only to the loss of empire and "the way it really was," but it is in fact the obstinate resistance of the silent image that seems to tell of the past, but *does not*, that makes us lose our sense of time. Its silence internalizes what should be chronologically prior in the poem. The landscape that launches this poem draws a loss that is said to have occurred prior to them poem into a repetition, or more properly an iteration, in the present. The disarticulation of this primary scene, highlighted by the failure of speech, brings the logical antecedence of a historical past into a language of a discontinuous present. At the end of the stanza, however, Leopardi provides an elaborate and elegiac figuration of the plant ("lover of sad places that the world has left/and constant friend of fallen greatness"), metaleptically substituting for silence without solving its temporal contradictions.

What I am suggesting here is that destruction is internal to the production of time in "La Ginestra," rather than functioning as a reference to a primary event that is cut off from an alienated present. Leopardi's use of "Ecco" and "Qui" demands that we look at

the way that time vanishes in the very command to look at what has been lost. This gesture conjoins what is left over from a presumable loss and the nowness of retrieval, a conjunction that is thematized by the rhetorical contradiction of a sight that makes silence into speech. That is, it seems that in Leopardi there is a distinctly Benjaminian quality of retrieval in which "what is remembered […] is not linked to the lost," as Andrew Benjamin writes, but rather, "Remembrance works against the lost in the name of a specific form of recovery. Remembrance unsettles. It breaks the links that hold that which was past as the past and which would demand reciprocally that the remembered be understood in terms of that pastness" (169).

Less ruin scattered landscapes in the poem are no more continuous than the one above. Indeed, the poem's critique of progress' redemption of time is given in another silent image. The trope of reflection, lifted from an Enlightenment lexicon of self-understanding, becomes the reversal or negation of historical progress:

Represented on these slopes you see	Dipinte in queste rive
the magnificent, progressive destiny	Son dell'umane gente
of humankind.	*Le magnifiche sorti e progressive*
Look here and see yourself reflected,	Qui mira e qui ti specchia,
proud and foolish century,	Secol superbo e sciocco,
who gave up the way forward	Che il calle insino allora
indicated by resurgent thought,	Dal risorto pensier segnato innanti
and, having changed course,	Abbandonasti, e volto addietro i passi,
	Del ritornar ti vanti,

boast of turning back
and call it progress. (49-58)

E procedere il chiami.

Leopardi launches his most explicit undoing of linear time with the now familiar: "Look here" ("Qui mira"). Again the command to look upends apprehension, giving time as a movement that empties out understanding rather than, in a Lockean sense, progressively ensuring it. Like the brief page of history or the silent and diminutive broom plant, the poet's address becomes an image and reflection that ironically reverses time. Prefiguring the trenchant critique of reason that would come out of Adorno's writing a hundred and fifty years later, Leopardi transposes the trope of subjective identity onto the historical negation of progress. Landscape, the Romantic scene of reflection *par excellence*, disappears onto a flat surface on which chronology founders. In lieu of insight, the century turns away from the emptiness of reflection and produces "progress," which does not name a chronological temporality but instead an involuted *series* of temporalities and potential temporalities that undulate, fall and turn back, and fail to make the mark indicated by thought. In this circle, we find that the failure of progressive history is much like "the very origins of *poesis*," where *poein* is the very turning away from that defines lyric poetry and its defensiveness or protectiveness from an absence or destruction of knowledge (Pyle *Art's* 21). The history Leopardi criticizes here is a kind of lyric history in Pyle's sense, one that turns away in order to disavow the fact that no destiny was to be found "on these slopes." This moment of looking empties out the time of progress as it

turns to figure reflection, suggesting again that such emptying or disruption is a quality of time itself rather than an aberration of it. When history is apprehended as progress it is in this turning and poetic fashion, but the gap of the image structures time too. Here again Leopardi literally deposits an image, reminiscent of the broom's stony silence, within the "progress" of figure's turning away.[115] While this passage is certainly satirical, repeats the movement between image and figure, disruption and substitution, that structures the metaleptic logic of the poem. It arrests the ordering of time, making it impossible to sequester destruction to the past by showing it present and at work in the construction of the present.[116]

[115] On this point Gramsci reads Leopardi entirely accurately, recognizing that his attachment to the irrational was not separable from his understanding of nature's mastery over man: "The birth and development of the idea of progress correspond to a widespread consciousness that a certain relationship has been reach between society and nature (including in the concept of nature those of chance and 'irrationality') such that as a result mankind as a whole is more sure of its future and can conceive 'rationally' of plans through which to govern its entire life. In order to combat the idea of progress, Leopardi had to have recourse to volcanic eruptions, that is to those natural phenomena which are still irresistible and irremediable…" (Gramsci 357).

[116] The gaps and vacancies that structure Leopardi's language can be difficult to read. Jonathan Galassi's translation of this passage tellingly inserts an absent address into the above stanza, which only further registers the difficulty of maintaining the reflection of Leopardi's irony (the "*magnificent, progressive destiny"*) without rushing to recuperate it through a gesture to an-other subject. Whereas a direct translation does yield the "Look here" ("Qui mira") of line 52, there is no reason to include, as Galassi does, an absent witness through the gesture of "you see" into what is otherwise painted on the slopes ("Dipinte in queste rive"). Galassi's desire to instantiate a subject where there is only a rhetorical substitution emphasizes the tension between figure and disfiguration, between thought's consistent turning back as it revisits, revives and resurrects a figure of the past and the disruption of that movement caused by the reflective image of the present.

But Leopardi also offers a less ironic confrontation with the destruction of progress than its twisting logic of "defensiveness or protectiveness." Roughly fifty lines later, he returns us to an iteration of those first lines where the broom plant's roots were living at the scene of loss, making the negation of progress into the condition of destiny. Leopardi's inversions of time affirm life in the negation of chronology, uprooting its position in a destiny that, like Benjamin's angel, only ever looks back at a past from which it progresses. Evoked in the imagery of those roots, Leopardi's sense of time is not simply caustic or critical but meant to orient us towards "our common destiny":

The noble nature is the one	Nobil natura è quella
who dares to lift his mortal eyes	Che a sollevar s'ardisce
to confront our common destiny	Gli occhi mortali incontra
and, with honest words	Al comun fato, e che con franca lingua,
that subtract nothing from the truth,	Nulla al ver datraendo,
admits the pain that is our destiny,	Confessa il mal che ci fu dato in sorte,
(111-116)	

In this final stanza Leopardi again invokes the gesture of looking, not as a command or direct address but in the third person: "the noble nature is the one/ who dares to lift his mortal eyes." Whether as second-person command ("Look here") or apostrophic, third-person address ("Now I see you here") the figure of looking has now emerged as a structuring gesture of the poem. Like the broom plant, this noble nature is given as a silent image whose looking is catachrestically substituted for speech, whose eyes give

words. This passage could easily be read as a kind of condemnation to a resolute acceptance of a homogenous destiny of the way that things are, through a truth that has been realized. Galassi's translation of "Nulla al ver datraendo," in the line "that subtract nothing from the truth" suggests such a reading. Subtraction is translated as a figure for accepting an unchangeable fate, as a kind of false subtraction from which there is nothing to take. The implications of such a loss that is not a loss renders pain an inescapable fate not unlike what Benjamin called the fated condition of "creaturely life."[117] The most direct reading of this passage, encouraged by Galassi's translation, recommends a resolute acceptance of our generalized condition of suffering as the best way to live. Here it only takes one serious look, or lifting of the eyes, to see the homogeneous state of our fate.

But, as with the repeated refrain in the rest of this poem, we are never asked to only look once. Indeed, the very root of subtraction ("datrarre") doubles as both destiny, in which subtraction is rendered moot, and another instance of looking, in which subtraction repeats an act that is unresolved throughout the poem. This stoic translation from which there is nothing to subtract, because destiny is given as what is and not what can be added to or taking away, misses is the non-identical repetition through which the idea of fate and destiny is given throughout the poem. That is, "datrarre" suggests subtraction, removal or taking away. But it also carries with it an etymological relation to the verb "levare," the root of "sollevare," which connotes both reduction or taking away and also means to lift or to raise. What Galassi translates as "subtract" comes from

[117] See Benjamin's "Trauerspiel and Trajedy" in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. For a helpful elaboration of creaturely life as the structure of fate and melancholy, rather than as a reference to nonhuman life, see Andrew Benjamin, "Appendix B Benjamin and the Baroque: Posing the Question of Historical Time," *Working with Walter Benjamin*, 222-242.

"datrarre," which can be read as inflected by destiny. But it can also be read as a complex iterative pattern of looking that repeats throughout this stanza.

Read more closely, this passage uses that same figure of looking that I have been tracking above to structure fate in a non-linear, metaleptic mode. The most immediate indicator of such repetition comes in the figure of nature as the one who "lifts its eyes" to encounter a common fate. If we read through, this figure of looking appears resolved in destiny ("sorte"). But "sorte" has a poetic affinity with "sollevar," the figure through which lifted eyes accept our destiny as what cannot be changed. *This affinity is non-semantic and phonemic.* "Sorte," or destiny, could easily slip into "sorto," an adverbial form that means "to rise, rise up, and appear at the horizon." The verb from which "sorto" derives is "sollevar," the same verb that ought to confirm fate. Destiny has a phonemic relation to the figure of lifting one's eyes, and to the verb that personifies fate: "sollevar." Thus even the figure of destiny, which ought to orient us resolutely to a present that cannot be changed, appears through a displaced repetition of a looking that appears at the horizon. Leopardi's own language here gets swept up in the failure to remain resolutely in what is, or in the "is" as a static or still negation. And destiny is a repetition of the figure of looking that never happens in the poem in the same way.

Galassi translates this as "that is," in reference to destiny, but the rhyme structure asks us to consider not only the pain ("il mal") that is given or that is our destiny. It also draws out a different relation through the non-signifying aspect of sound, thus mediating our access to fate in a non-linguistic manner. This repetition between the meaning and sound of fate is a repetition of the figure of looking that disrupts the chronological and nostalgic time of the poem. For there is a clear internal rhyme between "fato" and "dato"

that is lost in translation, but that in Italian forges a relation between a synonym of "sorte", "fato" and the phrase "ci fu dato." "Ci fu dato" translates literally into "was given to us," making the aural structure of rhyme a strange displacement of "fato," as if the way that fate is given offers a modification of fate itself. That is, sound deposits a difference within repetition. This cannot but provoke a different set of relations by which to read destiny. Instead of homogenous and determined, this passage calls attention to the way in which fate is given through the figure of looking we have seen in the rest of the poem, one that has previously arrested and emptied out secure reference to the past, and here conjoins our understanding of the future with that same figure. Understanding is cut by an allegory—an entirely literary reference—that is repeated within the poem. What is more, fate is figured and phonemed by a sequence that is non-linguistic. Destiny becomes inseparable from the way in which it is given and here Leopardi gives it through the iterability of etymology, sound and rhyme, and figuration, making fate a condition given by the gesture of looking.

Subtraction installs another repetition of this internal division between fate and looking, sound and meaning, between a resolute affirmation of "that is" or what is and the historical form in which it has been given. This conjuncture of figure and fate works metaleptically, incorporating fate as the effect and not the cause of having looked. Looking does not occur after the disaster. It does not come after it to reflect upon the past. Rather, this looking is its own disruption or discontinuity within the turn to fate. Leopardi's repetitions are not cyclical, then, but are split between semantic meaning, figure, etymology, and sound. Destiny becomes a repetition that shifts registers, an

iteration open to a horizon, a subtraction not from a homogenous, static nothing but a subtraction of what was never whole.

This incessant iteration instantiates a gap or interruption of that fate that would be determined outside the language of the poem by the fullness of the past. After all, we must recall that this destiny has been given to us ("ci fu dato") in a heterogeneous way by the poem itself. We have received this fate through the repeated looking to which the poem has enjoined us. Such repetition has been different at each injunction, however, and conjoins the act of looking with destruction rather than making looking the demarcation of a destruction that would divide the past from the present. Leopardi compresses that repetition of looking and losing in this stanza, bringing the force of metalepsis to bear on our reading of what this destiny entails. This destructive side of language reframes *il mal* or the pain of Galassi's translation not as an existential but rather a linguistic condition, from which there is nothing to subtract because there was nothing whole to begin with. "Lingua franca" seems to refer instead to precisely what Leopardi says, which is a subtraction of nothing rather than a subtraction to be suffered because it is one in which we lost all. The image Leopardi offers arises from the "franca lingua" that subtracts or removes nothing—it is frank or honest not because "true" but because it does not conceal what it is, it is what it says it is. It is like the *lingua franca* that derived from the Mediterranean and the trade routes centered there during the late 17th century, which was a hybrid or third language cobbled together strictly for the purposes of exchange. As a "language that is used by speakers of different languages as a common medium of communication; a common language" or "A generally understood or commonly used standard, system, or means of non-verbal communication" ("Lingua Franca") it is closer

to pure referentiality than to reference or figure. Leopardi's honest words are more like numbers than figures, more like a cipher or a zero that empties out reference to a stable past subtracted from the present. It "subtracts nothing" because it has nothing from which to subtract, no original whole to which it refers us. Such language "relates to what in the original belongs to language, and not to meaning" and leads to an "essential disarticulation of what was already there in the original […] that implies the suffering of what one thinks of as one's own—the *suffering* of the original language" (de Man 37 my emphasis).

But the poet's interdiction to look is also a creative one that cites a different root or "altra radice" for life:

out of real wisdom, then an honest,	Da verace saper, l'onesto e il retto
just society of citizens	Conversar cittadino,
and right and piety will take root	E giustizia e pietade, altra radice
from something more than vain	Avrannno allor che non superbe fole
mythologies;	Ove fondato probità del volgo
and on this foundation	Così star suole in piede
the people's probity may stand as firm	Quale star può quell ch'ha in error la sede.
as something that depends on error.	
(151-7)	

Above progress was the product of a *poeisis* that did not recognize itself as such. Here the future of life and another kind of destiny is grounded upon error. The difference upon

which Leopardi grounds community here is astounding and deeply etymological as it constellates root (radice) and error (in error) as an alternative time. Root's botanical reference functions etymologically as a foundation in its Latin root, which means to provide root to, to fix or establish firmly, and to become deeply implanted, but also to pull up by the roots and uproot forcibly. The use of error mimics the action of rooting, denoting a roaming, wandering and winding course. It also refers to a mistaken belief and incorrect action, creeping over into a cognitive figure for the uprooting or pulling of previous beliefs or events. Error spreads out like a root system in this stanza, fixing firmly by pulling up, doubling down on the reversals of reason, the temporal immediacy of a realized mistake. It does not correct for the false reflection of progress but embraces the undoing of reason as the condition for a future people. It meanders or wanders, owning up to and living on the failure of reason.

If the poetic turn of progress was a protective repression of reason's failure, then error is offered as the radix, the Latinate root, of a different society. Error is a root, not reason. Leopardi's cure for the repression, and regression, of reason is not to devise a superior notion of reason but to name our origin as a mistake and not a myth. Error and root become synonyms for each other as Leopardi intimates the botanical and judicial, locating the establishment or "radice" of a society with the overturning of judgment or the recognition of a mistake. Countering the dialectic of enlightenment's resolution of contradiction into a doctrine of necessity, Leopardi establishes another root on the avowal of essential error. This turning of error is not the same turning away from the non-progressive time that we saw above, a turning away that overcompensates with the false mastery of reason. Nor is it a relativizing articulation of human thought in which nothing

is to be decided or established. Instead Leopardi provides this figure of life, which is also a figure of arrested time, as the anti-foundation for the reproduction of social life.

My reading here is meant to withdraw Leopardi from a staunch and stoic realism or *realpolitik* grounded in suffering as a fixed determination.[118] That realism is part and parcel of the nationalist imagination with which I began this chapter. For sure, such a reading might be encourage by the "common destiny" of pain ("il mal") that Leopardi asserts. And indeed, pain is often read as the ensured destiny in Leopardi's writing. The guarantee of the future as a repetitive decline is one side of a dialectic of which the other is the transcendence of the imagination I described in the introduction. Nicola Gardini unites these in a reading of negation as such a condition of transcendence in which the present "acquires a positive aspect as soon as it […] turns into a virtually mystical contemplation of a time separated from all painful feeling of decline" (87). This dialectic of foreclosed time and transcendent imagination is precisely what I am trying to counter in reading Leopardi's structure of history through a series of incommensurate figures. Unlike the sublime allowance of voyeuristic destruction that Comay describes as the "'safe space' of one who can afford to traverse the fantasy" (31), Gardini's place of "virtually mystical contemplation," Leopardi's figure of looking erodes the insulation between life and thought. The mechanism I have tried to draw out here is a continual compression of time in which the past is drawn into the present becomes the product of the loss of their distinction: "Here on the dry flank" (1); "And I've seen your shoots" (7);

[118] My reasons for wanting to resist this reading of a community built on an absence of the future are made clearer by the end product of what Paul Hamilton reads as Leopardi's *realpoetik*, which end up making the romantic imagination the precursor to something like a Habermasian sense of the public.

"that was once mistress of men" (11); "Now I see you here again" (14); "Now one ruin envelops everything" (33). These oscillations between present, passato remoto and prophecy launch the poem with a sense of the catastrophe of recollection, a repetition that consolidates the plane of everything. Neither is the eponymous broom plant is promised anything more than finitude, even if Leopardi's conclusion does give it the status of singular, unbowed resistance: "And you, too, pliant broom…will soon succumb/to the cruel power of subterranean fire…And unresisting,/you'll bow your blameless head…*but you will have not bowed before*" (297-305).

This material language, like the silent image of the broom plant from the first lines of the poem, does not carry destruction with it in as some untouched or long lost event. Its "grave and silent aspect" continues "embellishing the lonely plain" through a root or *stelo* that extends itself, spreading out beneath the surface and emerging to make a demand that it be read today. The subtraction of its "honest words" are the radicals of a text that, as Ian Balfour has described, "says and does what it says and does [in] the poetics of the text, the mechanisms and machinations of the rhetorical movements or performance of the text" (209, 210). Its rhetorical movements figure a life disrupted rather than a past preserved for "virtually mystical contemplation."

Reading Leopardi's performative images thus requires attending to the way that his text asks us to look at history. The gap or displacements produced by figure's reference cannot be equated with something that has been lost to the past, but that is continually disrupt the desire to treat loss as a site of fullness. There is an alternative way to account for the metaleptic temporalities evoked by Leopardi's language that does not preserve a desire to restore time, or what Luzzi calls Italian Romanticism's "foundation

myth" found "among Italy's dead instead of its living" (cite). That account is a philological, rather than historical, one that emerges "from […] a need to understand texts from a time and place decidedly different from that of the interpreter, most notably across the chasm between ancient and modern, a gulf that has to be bridged but may not be able to be bridged" (Balfour 199). This leap of metalepsis risks both as preservationist or transient mode, and what I have tried to argue here is that Leopardi writes history within that risk. And while such a leap clears away and empties out the security of our relation to the past, Leopardi also suggests that it can provide a root for what can be created, in error, in the here and now.

III. The Image and the Word

Leopardi's own theory of language provides the grounds for such a materialist philology. In a section of the *Zibaldone* that accounts for the relationship between word, image and social function Leopardi writes that:

> The concomitant ideas that I have said are *awakened* by even the most proper of words… the countless ideas, memories, etc., attached to words that come from their being used every day…are *linked to habit* and the very many different circumstances in which that word has been used and heard […] These ideas are very often *linked to the word* (which…is inseparable from the thing, it is its image, its body, even when the thing is material, indeed it is identical to it…) [Caesar 1701]

Leopardi relies in part here on an Enlightenment associative theory of language to account for the relationship between words and ideas through habit. In this sense, he is quite close to the associationist strain of thinking elaborated by seventeenth and eighteenth-century thinkers like David Hume, John Locke, David Hartley and Joseph Priestley, for whom language was a habituated response to environment and education. Associationism was, essentially, a linguistic theory of social construction and a dialectics of culture and individual. This theory of language understood basic semiotics as acquired through physiological responses to sensation, sounds, and pressures that were translated into a train of thoughts linked over time through individual memory. But individual memory itself was, in a normative mode, founded upon the social and cultural context in which one learned. Meaning was understood to accrue through habit and repetition and as a result of an arbitrary but systematic arrangement of signs. While a lingering concern over the formative power of the arbitrary or the frequency of aberrations to habituation were discussed in associationist theories of all kinds—and it was certainly a heterogeneous field—a regulatory power or harmony tended to be assumed as a quality of the physiological material—minds and bodies—in question. Leopardi's theory of language as expressed above is oftentimes read as such a cultural construction and sedimentation of the arbitrary through the contextual reference of Italian culture. Habituation in this mode becomes another name for historical context, especially Italian culture, that grounds poetic meaning. It is possible to read this section, then, as suggesting that what ought to be "awakened" through language is a kind of uncovering or

redemption of the way in which words were used in an everyday manner in the past, fixed by the movement of culture.

But here I want to call attention to a *distinction* at work between habit and word that troubles such a cultural historical approach. Leopardi's notion that memory and habitual use are linked to *the word*, the thing, the image requires caution rather than conflation. This notion of the word is elsewhere described in the *Zibaldone* not as a product of habit or association, but as originating. He writes of that while genera or modes of classification "can be infinite," that such classification begins with the word: "It is all a question of words, and the rules depend only upon the mode in which the thing is written: *they do not exist before the poem, but are born with it, or from it*" (my emphasis [1673]). There is an originating, rather than contextualizing, power of the word in this sense. Chains of association through which we come to understand the relation between the everyday and language can be said to derive from a word that is not identical to that process. This means that memory, habit, and the figurative or cognitive function of words are founded *not only* on previous usage in some kind of infinite regress of everyday use, *but also* the origin of words as *things* themselves. Awakened ideas are perhaps more divided than continuous in being "linked to habit" and "linked to the word." This origin is akin to what Forest Pyle describes in Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn" as the origin that "is the image […] understood as possessing its own powers of origination" but not, importantly, intention ("Romantic" 196). The cognitive function of the word is not its only or even its originary capacity; indeed, it would seem here that Leopardi hints at the origin of language as something like an event, what he cryptically writes as "the idea of something *finished*, that is, beyond which there is nothingness; of something *forever*, and that will

never again return" [2243].[119] Words can, indeed, entail a creation and destruction within the fixing of time within historical context. This notion of language helps us to grasp a creation and destruction that operates immanently or internally to history rather than as its atemporal point of origin. These forces operate within a poem as the possibility of wresting an event from habit and context.

Leopardi's use of the term "awaken" or "desto" further enforces the sense of a word's *originating* or destructive power, rather than its habitual or referential usage. When Leopardi later writes in the same section that the Linnean [sic] name for a plant or animal can make clear what a thing is, he seems indeed to be referring to the habitual or acquired nature of language and the way in which words are bound to ideas through an arbitrary structure of Enlightenment linguistics. But his strange use of the term "awaken" to describe the thing-ness of the word or the idea-word nexus, suggests that he is thinking philologically rather than structurally; that is, the words to which he refers us here are instantaneous images called up in Balfour's "chasm between ancient and modern" that must be bridged. Such bridges are not habits but awakenings. The boundedness of the signifier to signified here is not a Saussurean structure of reference, but rather the paradox by which a word can be understood as a material thing of origination and finishing rather than as a bearer of signification and continuation; and the memory or habit attached to such a word is not only a reference or figure of retrieving the past, but opens out as a philological trace that arrives from a disarticulated past as a force. For this

[119] Compare to Walter Benjamin's fragment on history as an image, where he writes that "the past can only be seized as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognisability, and is never seen again" ("Theses" 255).

reason, it seems more than coincidental that Leopardi chooses *costringere* or "to force" as the exemplary word by which to make a case for etymology:

> Now as long as the etymologies of what *originally were metaphors*… and are recognized and felt, as happens at least in the greater part of a language's *proper* words, the idea that they awaken is, so to speak, double…*they produce in the mind not only the conception but the image of the thing,* however abstract it might be, for even these, in any language, are always expressed in the last analysis by metaphors drawn from what is material and sensible […] For example, our word *costringere*, which means *to force still clearly retains its etymology, and therefore the material image* from which this word, which is originally a metaphor, derived, etc. etc… in poetry, where the most attention is paid to the full value of each word…there is a greater readiness to conceive and take note of the images they contain, etc., […] [Caesar 1703 my emphasis]

Even in the development of the everyday use and habitual understanding of language, which above Leopardi suggests is at the basis of producing proper nouns, there is a doubled function in which the originating idea, metaphor and image can be awakened. Indeed, what is originary in etymology here is not habitual use or context but its metaphoricity or what is intralinguistic. And what is within language is not primarily cognitive or referential but material: "the image of the thing." While esoteric, Leopardi suggests a distinction between associationist materiality and a linguistic materiality,

between communication and etymology. And inasmuch as the former refers to the naturalization of referential meaning in social life, the latter refers to the continued possibility of something other than that naturalization breaking through in language. Etymology retains the materiality of language—its forcefulness—which Leopardi here explains as a difference within language (the conception and the image) that is evoked by attending to "each word." Each word indexes a different time, perhaps the time of habit and the time of image, or the time in which metaphor has been forgotten and a time of greater readiness to recall it. It is important to read carefully in order to not confuse philology with a retrieval of a previous idea through the analogue of metaphor, which would be to reduce "material and sensible" words to physical sensation, as Daniela Bini and others have argued in regards to Leopardi's materialism. This is to confuse materiality with a science of bodies rather than to understand it as a philosophy of history of which such a science is a part. Instead, etymology should be read here as an instance of the example that Leopardi provides here, which is that of *force* of an image retained and awakened in language. It is like the force that Leopardi described elsewhere in the Zibaldone as Dante's poetic rhythm, which is simultaneous and rapid and that treats words like words rather than like lines or phrases.

What is material about words in the description above is not the same thing as their incorporation into habitual or everyday usage, even if it is the constellation of use, memory and habit that archives their etymological force. Words, or words in their function as images, designate a performative dimension in Leopardi's theory of language that exceeds habit. The fact that words do things rather than mean things—that they can figure force rather than understanding as I have suggested above— offers an important

division from within structure of habit and the everyday or what Andrew Benjamin has called "a move away from a politics of habit and towards a politics of time" (187).[120] Such a politics of time offers a more *an-archic* foundation than that upon which the nation and national unity is grounded but from which it cannot turn away. The materiality of language, as I have tried to demonstrate above in my reading of "La Ginestra," is the force of words that appear as images; not as figures of return or elegies for the lost fullness of the past but as illegible fragments that shock or awaken us by their difficult demand to read in the fallout of metalepsis.

Leopardi's images of language introduce the possibility of retrieving force from within the gaps of metalepsis. Here and now, these material images seem to exist outside or beyond the determination of figure towards movement, substitution and displacement. If metalepsis "names the movement of that gap" from one figure to the next, then I am suggesting that there can also be a stoppage in the work that moves a poem, and that we could call that stoppage, in Leopardi's language, the image. To be clear, this philological approach bears little resemblance to the "attempts to restore some ideal form," that Nicola Gardini proposes as an explanation for Leopardi's nostalgia, based on a "philological speculation" that calls for a "resurrection" of the lost past. Instead, it is a process that Leopardi describes as the persistence of "the material image of [a word's] original metaphor, derivation, etc. etc.", "the image of the thing" (129) in language. Leopardi's treatment of philology as an archive of word images thus offers an alternative mode by which to read "La Ginestra," *not as a history of nostalgia but as a poetic image*

[120] This theory of language becomes all the more important to consider within the context of the later political movement of the Italian *Risorgimento* and its identification with the cultivation of linguistic nationalism that Harry Hearder claims was substantially influenced by Johann Herder's grounding of a people's history and nation primarily in language.

of life that he describes in the poem as "the bitter fate/ and miserable condition nature handed us" that "made you so unhappy that/ you turned your backs like cowards on the light/ that made it patent" (79-82).

IV. A Poetic Prescription

Rebecca Comay's assessment of the traumatic effects of the French Revolution upon German thinkers is in part a critique of the transference of politics into culture, through an idealization that substitutes a revolution in thought for a revolution in authority. Through such substitution, the failure of a political revolution becomes a marker of historical and cultural progress. A form of nostalgia emerges there through a substitution of the loss of what never happened with a history in which there is nothing to lose. The aesthetic provides a continuity that history fails to give and "crisis is harnessed to the project of cultural critique," where political revolution in France becomes "the autonomous self-legislation of the work of art" in Germany.

While Italy presents a different case, what Comay reads in German Idealists resonates with Leopardi's reception as a melancholic poet who "in the very act of transforming his sad experience into art […] successfully grappled with and mastered even the most painful and most melancholy of material" (Singh 70). The criticism I traced at the beginning locates Leopardi within such a nostalgic and melancholic politics. But I have been trying to argue that both his poetry and his philosophy of language sustains an interest in a history that cannot be melancholic in such a way, because the appearance of the past and of what has been lost far too precariously returns in what is

left of the present. Indeed, the namesake of "La Ginestra" takes these temporal discontinuities I have been tracing above and returns them to us as a form of life, translating what Comay calls trauma into the root of the Broom Plant. Leopardi thus offers us a flower rarely seen in Romantic poetry, one that grounds life in the finite, the forceful and the destroyed. Rather than the symbol of culture's restorative work, Leopardi gives us a figure of life rooted in the destruction of time. Here below I want to draw out a closer link between the historical and rhetorical disruptions elaborated above, by thinking more closely about how Leopardi's peculiar apostrophic and lyrical writes in poetry what his plant does physiologically.

I conclude by arguing that Leopardi's language in "La Ginestra" effects something like a purgative upon a melancholic and nationalizing history. While painful and bitter, a purgative is good for life. The force of the poem's disruption (of word from meaning, etymology from chronology) gives us a non-recuperative way to think about the destruction I have wrested from his writing. Here, the "etymology" of the broom serves as a disruptive curative for the more contemporary mode of nostalgia established by readings such as Paul Hamilton's in which the "'higher unity'" of aesthetics and culture become the sequestered repository of what was made impossible in the failure of revolution. Treating an idealizing nostalgia with a more materialist one, I turn to a treatment for what Kevis Goodman uncovers as the condition of the eighteenth century, an illness of disturbed psycho-physiology and involuntary motion, which she also reads as a "somatic and psychological protest" (199) in a "world historical present" of "disordered motions [that] recognized […] the global movements of persons among

peoples" (207).[121] Goodman diagnosis nostalgia, in part, as emergent with the newly globalized movements of history as it was indexed by individual human bodies.

Taken at this world historical moment, Leopardi's own displaced context of pre-*Risorgimento* Italy, a setting so historically out of step with such global movements that it prompted Gramsci's theory of passive revolution, perhaps registers as a strange complement to Goodman's nostalgia. But it is a resonance between one of the treatments for Goodman's version of nostalgia and Leopardi's "Ginestra" that is most evocative for me, as a way to think the prescription his poetry gives for our apprehension of the present. Goodman notes that emetic or purgative treatments were often recommended in the eighteenth century to cure nostalgia, when it was understood as the inharmonious balance of bodily motions. Purgatives arrested the imbalanced motions of the mind, allowing them to reset back to a state of equilibrium. Leopardi's Broom is such an emetic, not only in a poetic but in physiological practice. While Leopardi wrote "La Ginestra" in Naples, where he would have certainly seen the Broom growing in the barren terrain of Mount Vesuvius, it is unclear why Leopardi chose this plant as the namesake of his poem. But Leopardi's Broom, which is an unspecified genera of the tribe Genisteae and of the genus Cytisus or Cytisus scoparius, was known in both Mediterranean and British contexts as an excellent purgative.[122]

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[121] Hamilton quotes Julian Roberts on a dialectical philosophy that he also uses to support his notion of *Realpoetik*, in which "'all diversification is matched by return to a higher unity.'" Hamilton continues, in his own words, "This is the metaphysical basis for Romantic procedures in the republic of letters" (7). That republic of letters is where he understands poetic and political projects to converge, where discourse offers a continual elaboration of different in unity or identity that institutions cannot.

[122] Two main genera of the broom plant seem likely candidates for Leopardi's homage: either the Spanish broom or the common broom plant. The former seemed to have had more powerful salutary effects and was native to the Mediterranean; the latter was also used as a purgative and is the plant to which my citations of homeopathic manuals refer.

Figure 1. The Common Broom and the Spanish Broom (1791)

According to the *London Medical Gazette* in 1837, the broom plant produces a "most marked and beneficial effect" as an "emetic and purgative"; Edward Baylis' *A New and Compleat Body of Practical Physic* recorded in 1791 that the broom is a "potent expeller of pituitous and ferous humours, both by vomit and stool"; and the 1755 edition of Boerhaave's *Materia Medica* noted it as "a powerful Astringent, but it is not so much used as it deserves." As a purgative, the broom plant helps to "eliminate or expel (waste or harmful matter) from the body or an organ" when ingested or taken into the body, producing violent and disruptive motions ("Purge"). A purgative is like a physiological metalepsis, in that it turns sickness into health and translating what is inside to the

outside. The homeopathic effect of the broom plant induces convulsions and expulsions within the human body, bringing its boundaries into crisis and bringing about discontinuity in order to cure.

Like Leopardi's ironic twist on the "*magnificent, progressive destiny* of mankind" it expels out onto the surface in an instance of inversion. "La Ginestra" intensifies the metaleptic compression and contamination of its rhetoric by addressing the problem of such destiny and a "world historical present," never the disordered motions of individual bodies. His purgative applies to an aestheticized history that "counters the political disharmony of Italy" with an "architectonic and symbolic coherence," and the "conflating of nationalist and religious rhetoric" in the myth of cultural unity (Luzzi 9). Instead of the reliquary, Leopardi's images make of the landscape "one ruin," translating history into a totalizing fragment:

Now one ruin envelops everything
where you take root, noble flower,
and, as if sharing in the pain of others,
send a waft of sweetest scent
into the sky (31-36)[123]

The world history of "La Ginestra" is "one ruin" where the purgative takes root, blooming later into the "bitter fate/ and miserable condition nature handed us" (79). The bitterness of totalized ruin is not a reference to a homogenized condition, but a divided

[123] Similarly, see a later stanza in which "Extinct Pompeii" returns only "like a buried skeleton" viewed from the eyes of a "wanderer, gazing down the rows of broken colonnades" (272, 275-6).

sensuous response that is both sweetness and pain. The one ruin prompts a physiological reaction like the bitterness described by Alexander Bain's *Mental and Moral Science*, not the generality of melancholy but the "'the proper pain of taste'" (OED). This more proper pain evokes both resistance and acceptance, a paradox that differs from the homogenous and static condition of pain that I suggested was at work in Galassi's translation above. Here it is at once a name for what is "unpalatable to the mind; unpleasant and hard to 'swallow' or admit" ("Bitter") but that, as a purgative, must be also be expelled, even confessed.[124] This ruined root is perhaps bitter and undesirable, but the confession it forces is one that is good for life.[125] "La Ginestra" expels nostalgia as a condition that divide past from present by internalizing, swallowing, admitting that life takes root on a ruin that contaminates all. This is the final sense in which we can understand Leopardi's grounding in philology as informing Nietzsche's own, by which I mean to say that his insistence on the linguistic quality of the historical is not a resolute acceptance of decline, but a paradoxical affirmation of life through the destruction of the determined nature of decline.

No criticism I have seen thus far refers to the explicit connection of "La Ginestra" to botanical purgatives or more generally to Leopardi's work. But he explicitly takes up the purgative as a trope for Nature, or as a trope for the relationship between

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[124] The first etymology of "purge" given by the OED is "To clear oneself or one's character of an accusation or suspicion of guilt […] to establish one's innocence by an assertion on oath supported by character witnesses" (Purge).

[125] This question of how to read the root as a ruin is central to de Man's reading of "Triumph of Life," since when the poet in the poem first encounters Rousseau he mistakes him for a gnarled and solitary root (II. 182-88).

particularities of nature and Nature as a universal. In the *Zibaldone* Leopardi ironizes the supposed unity and perfection of nature through this trope:

> As long as the naturalists and the ascetics will go into ecstasies of admiration over *the infinite artfulness and wisdom* of the defenses that they find upon examining the anatomies of the organized bodies, I […] will compare the management of nature to that doctor who used to treat me with purgatives. Knowing that my stomach was much weakened by them, he ordered the use of decoctions of quinine and other tonics to fortify it and to lessen the action of the purgatives without interrupting their use. But, I humbly ask, would not the action of the purgatives be immediately lessened if I took a less efficacious dose or a smaller amount since their use had to be continued? [King 4206]

Here the purgative tropes the excessive, almost absurd, way that both nature and medicine operate with an autoimmune logic. Both turn bodies against bodies, organs against organs, in a way that exceeds rational comprehension. Nature is like a doctor in this passage, equipping species with defenses against one another much in the way doctors heal bodies. Both turn internal parts against each other for the sake of defense, using a tactic that originates because nature is neither harmonious or peaceful. Purgatives can function as curatives because nature is like the suffering of language—it was never whole to being with. And while Leopardi complains of his treatment, he does not move to side of naturalists and aesthetics who impute an artfulness or wisdom to either nature or

bodies. He remains convinced of the necessity, or at least the nature, of their immanent disruptions.

This rhetoric of the purgative, then, redistributes what might have appeared as a holistic or totalizing whole into parts, divisions, and differences. A treatment of Nature and bodies as if they could be restored to such a whole risks their safety and health, but adequate treatment involves a kind of continuously calibrated antagonism of parts. This state, like the suffering of language, give us a Nature that was never an ideal condition. Leopardi's evocative figuration of the purgative for nature disfigures wholeness, harmony, even habituation by gesturing to its unselfsame and ruined origins, which are made apparent by first attending to his meditations on the difference between habitual and originary words.

This force does not remain confined to the linguistic or the cognitive; its effect on the body or the economy of balance between an internal and external body is one that halts its functioning and forces a division between that which is toxic and that which is good for life. But this division—like that of nature and bodies—takes place from within. Goodman has made the case that reading's therapeutic effect on nostalgia in Wordsworth's "Preface" was itself an effect of tautology, rather than the metaleptic disruptions I have described above. For Goodman, tautology demanded that the material mind be submitted to an involuntary repetition of the kind that plagued those suffering from nostalgia, who could not control their mental associations. Through this mode of trauma repetition, she argues, readers might produce their own "desynonymization differentiation" and "unravel" their unhealthy attachment to a past object or sensation that

plagued them (225). Repetition might be curative once it emphasized "words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as THINGS" (219).

For Leopardi, words are things too, and their divergence from context or association is suggestive of an awakening of different senses of the past. Leopardi's temporal destructions, written into figures and etymologies throughout "La Ginestra," might be read along these lines of awakening and arrest, of a purgation that operates on the historical. His contamination of the present and the past ensures that "there is a greater readiness to conceive and take note of the images [words] contain." Thus can destruction, and its appearance as a poetic image or the poetic word as a thing that can be retrieved in a non-signifying way, make for a life in ruined things, in the words as things that remain divisible from, retrievable from, the continuous context of culture and nationalism.

Of course, there are numerous critical ruin-populated landscapes of materialist theory in which something like Leopardi's honest confrontation leaves us with a history as illegible as it is violent. Paul de Man describes such a shocked terrain in Percy Shelley's "Triumph of Life" as one in which, "nothing, whether deed, word, thought, or text precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence" ("Shelley Disfigured" 122). And there is an unmistakably negative operation at work between life and history in Leopardi's "Ginestra," whose flower introduces a series of historical reflections on a destroyed landscape upon which the past vanishes and fragments into the truth of the present. The "present" within which we are situated there is thus always uneven and disjointed. In this sense, Leopardi's poetics is useful in constellating what de Man

describes as the violent contingency of the historical with what Goodman described as Romanticism's "world historical present" of "colonial mobility […] forced travel, depopulation, emigration, and other kinds of compulsory movements" (199-200). Such a present does not need to be broken from the past. Discontinuities make for the only available living in the present. The fact that Leopardi's own geographic home was historically discontinuous with dialectic of such movements and the "progress" of history makes his writing all the more interesting in its writing of history as such discontinuity.[126]

Writing the future of the nation in the ruins of empire, Leopardi locates modern life on a landscape of ongoing destruction. His writing seems concerned with the astonishing fact of survival within a world saturated by decay and the endless translation of material life into the abstractions of reason—the abstractions of mere life—as the defining feature of modernity. There are no shortages of "world historical presents" in which such writing feels timely today. Antonio Negri has argued that Leopardi's poetry registered the immense destructive and creative forces of life that Marxists refer to as the process of subsumption.[127] For Negri, Leopardi is best understood as a poet of the productive forces cultivated up to the present, through a process that undid feudal forms

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[126] My reading of Leopardi's timely discontinuity here bears some affinity with postcolonial reflections on Gramsci's reading of the *Risorgimento*. What I find useful in his Gramscian articulation is the necessarily incomplete and disjointed relation between economic conditions and the hegemony of the state, which serves as a reminder of a principle that grounds both political consolidation and struggle. While he and Gramsci read the fragmentary conditions of such hegemony as particular to an anti-colonial politics, in which Italy certainly counts, it seems useful to consider the dialectics between passive and active, indirect and direct development of political force that they articulate within the context of the development and management of life vis-à-vis reproduction and population in the Romantic period as well.

[127] As Timothy Murphy notes in a short piece on Negri's book, for Negri Leopardi is a singular poet because he seems to anticipate the complete subsumption of society and social relations by capitalism: "Leopardi's work bears an important structural and historical resemblance to postmodernism […] Marx's distinction between the formal subsumption of society within capitalism and its real subsumption provides a key to the terms of this resemblance" (6).

of life by transforming the time of labor and the spaces of reproduction. Leopardi is a powerful poet of subsumption for Negri, as it destroyed and recreated relations of production and reproduction in two distinct phases, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the contemporary age of automation and finance. For him, Leopardi's writing of a non-linear, *kairotic* temporality abandons the melancholy of his Italian context, ultimately capturing that of empire and industrial capitalism that was not Leopardi's own.[128] The Italian condition is timely in its untimeliness for Negri, inasmuch as it is exemplary of the temporal discontinuities that prophecy the end of a nationalist logic, in the constitutive non-linearity of development. Negri wagers on those discontinuities on the side the creativity and construction of history. But today it seems impossible to not read Leopardi's lyric, and its involvement with the dialectic of empire and capital, without the climatological crisis through which creativity tips over, again, into destruction. As Frèdèric Neyrat describes, in appropriately metaleptic terms, "environmental catastrophe is part of our daily reality. Apocalypse turns into an accident and accident into apocalypse. Thus catastrophe [is] a relation of continuity grounded on permanent discontinuity." The goal, he writes, is "to open a space for an alternative politics […] that will act not only in advance or after the fact but now" (249). Neyrat

[128] For Negri it is precisely because Leopardi lived outside the center of capitalist development that he could grasp something its savage anomaly, to use a phrase Negri elsewhere applies to Spinoza: "If by the middle of the century Leopardi was well-known in Europe as the symbol of the past grandeur of Italy and its ruin, and as a sign of and demand for its revival [Risorgimento], this happen on one condition: that Leopardi's thought showed a profound consonance with European thought. Leopardi was an 'Italian case,' but that case could be understood because it expressed a homogenous passage at the European level" (xxiii) and "Thus, the European Leopardi. His memory is European and the time that he grasps is that which governs the whole historical cycle of the Enlightenment, the revolution, and the restoration" (xxvi).

suggests that metalepsis is the condition of life today. His diagnosis is to insist on living in it and the immediacy it demands.

Leopardi's own internalization of catastrophe, perhaps prompted by his own dislocation from history, perhaps motivated by a language that refused to identify the past with irredeemable loss, reminds us that to consign the present to fate is to give up on a politics of time. The double entendre of Leopardi's broom plant intimates ruination and life, in a manner that keeps the historical both a site of destruction and struggle. And as Negri notes, Leopardi's world historical present is also our own, in which "one ruin envelops everything" AND makes the only bed on which life can take root. Perhaps in reading Leopardi between the inseparable catastrophe of the state and of the environment we can continue to remember that treatment does not entail a mourning for what is lost to us but rather a commitment to confessing the continual and necessary destruction of harmony in the present. If, as Beatrice Hanssen has argued, one of Benjamin's contributions to continental philosophy was to think a natural history in which decay is the structure of time, then perhaps a return to Leopardi can contribute to our thinking of such time with an eye towards the struggle that Leopardi understood as irreducible from life.[129] The rigor of his heterogeneous materialism suggests that life and its

[129] On this point in particular see Timpanaro's critique of Marxist humanism through Leopardi's theory of the necessity of struggle against the absolute power of Nature both in *On Materialism* and "Considerations on Materialism": "The later Leopardi, while he did not believe that the growth of knowledge would produce a growth of happiness (and in this sense he was not and never had been an Enlightenment thinker, at least in the more narrowly defined sense of the term), was nevertheless convinced that it was necessary, against Italian and European 'moderates', to develop a materialist and pessimistic culture *for all*. That it was necessary to cease 'pacifying' the masses with the opium of religion, and instead to found a *common* morality, based on the solidarity of all men in the struggle against nature: a struggle that is, in the final analysis, a desperate one, but which alone can make all men brothers, outside all paternalist hypocrisy" (20).

reproduction—human and nonhuman—must be grasped in a disjointed and broken manner, as the fragmentary product of a history that opens life up to struggle because destruction is continuous within it.

Which is to say that the constitutive work of Leopardi's poetry is not to generate an immaterial or ideal account of a life that is separated from the present. It is to produce an understanding of life in its present discontinuities and unevenness that neither naturalizes it nor empties it of the production of a future. In contrast to such accounts, the broom plant reveals a poetics of the imagination that thrives on and puts roots down in the destroyed landscapes such as the one Leopardi uses to stage the poem. Indeed, in his 1779 edition *The Gentleman Farmer,* Lord Kames attests to the inherent difficulty and persistent vitality of this plant when faced as foe, writing that to cut down the broom will not suffice, as its roots remain lodged in the ground and require removal with a spiked plough and two oxen. If cut only with a scythe, "the broom comes up next year in double quantity; for it springs from young roots" (55). Such is the form of life that Leopardi's image as a root or origin that threatens to destroy or disrupt our habitual figures of history generates. Leopardi's poetry does not become an immunized refuge from the material world in my reading, but allows us to inhabit it only by admitting the destruction in which we live. Here is it not inconsequential to note that one of the landscapes on which the *Genisteae* thrives is the "mediterranean shrubland (maquis) and disturbed places," ("Cytisus") the "maquis" that became the name for the rural French resistance during World War II because they took to the "disturbed places" in France absent forest cover or lush vegetation. Rather than reading the broom as a material form of life that lives through the destruction of history (of empire…of voice…of the body of the past…) that

plant and romantic poetics more broadly continues to be read as desirous for a wholeness that existed prior to destruction or that could be projected through political institutions grounded in the nation-state. Living through and on devastated terrain is not just a function of surviving or of bare life, but of creating an environment in which resistance can be organized in the abeyance of the strong messianic recuperation of some lost past. From this perspective, what has been lost is not the past but is an ongoing experience of the present. The command that Leopardi gives us is to truly live in the destruction of the present. This lesson informs readings not only of Leopardi's poetics of history but also why we ought to read more romantically in the present.

Romantic Marx: Chiasmus and Tautology/Species Being and Need

I. Romantic Marx

Almost directly in the middle of the *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx makes a somewhat unintelligible remark about the obvious distinction of human and nonhuman organs. He declares: "It is obvious that the human eye gratifies [*geniesst*] itself in a different way from the crude [*rohe*], non-human eye [*unmenschliche*]; the human ear different from the crude ear, etc. etc." (88). Marx's distinction is a poetic one. It goes without explanation, demanding acceptance on the basis of its having been said. Unlike most of Marx's later writing, where what seems obvious is always in question, this statement is meant to be taken at face value. But how are we to read this dissected face? What does one do with a statement that is posited as self-evident but clearly illegible? What supports this distinction written on the human face? And how does an eye, an ear, gratify itself so singularly?

This chapter takes up the ways in which reading young Marx might be a much-needed rereading today. Further, it begins to suggest that reading Marx Romantically might be the only way to return to him. It is no bold claim to consider young Marx through the lens of Romanticism, of course. In some ways, it simply paraphrases the reason for Louis Althusser's exclusion of Marx's early work from the Marxist canon. But my argument here will be that to call Marx a romantic is not nearly as legible a distinction as it might seem. Indeed, young Marx perhaps shows us that to be labeled a romantic only initiates the task of deciding what it means, again.

In continuity with the rest of this dissertation I want to suggest that the *44' Manuscripts* are romantic in their production of the disruptive and disfiguring life that I have called riotous. Turning to such a life allows us to persist, as readers, with its destructiveness and to remain with what is glimpsed in the smoldering end of anthropomorphosis. I argue that if we attend to the way that Marx's thinking is structured rhetorically, rather than strictly philosophically or economically, we find a different emphasis on the function of material life, as well as human and nonhuman life, within capitalism that later becomes overdetermined by Marx's and Marxists' focus on production, mechanism and value. The *44' Manuscripts* ask us to return to what I will consider here as the materiality of life under capitalism, or its ability to empty out the cognitive (even lyrical) content of capitalism's endless self-reference and posit life against abstraction. If the persuasive fantasy of capitalism is the impossibility of imagining its end, then I want to argue here that Marx's radical materialism also creates instances in which life appears as an "entirely inexorable" demand in which "there is no alternative to it"—to positing its end.[130]

That is certainly not the takeaway for most readers of the *Manuscripts*. In *For Marx* Althusser famously dismissed that text based on its inability to account for the ideological conditions of its own thinking. In a sense the *Manuscripts* were entirely too legible from Althusser's vantage point, and their failure was that the context of their writing had not been "read" by Marx himself. The Marx of the *Manuscripts* was too inside of German philosophy and the battle over Idealism to produce a material analysis

[130] I take this language from Paul de Man's description of the disfiguring force of language towards the end of "Shelley Disfigured," where he writes that "The positing power of language is both entirely arbitrary, in having a strength that cannot be reduced to necessity, and entirely inexorable in that there is no alternative to it" (116).

of a "world worst crushed by its own ideology."[131] Althusser's critique of the *Manuscripts* centered on its reproduction of Feuerbach's terminology and "above all in the concepts of *alienation*, of *humanism*, of the *social essence of man*, etc." (156).[132] Such terms were not in and of themselves uninteresting to Althusser, but they did substitute philosophy where there needed to be a rigorous analysis of the economy. They took an ontology—humanism—for granted where what was needed was an analysis of the production of the ideology, or even the theology, of man. And, most importantly, they took consciousness, its social manifestation, and the loss of it as the primary site of analysis.[133] In other words, they were romantic.

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[131] It is worth noting here that de Man, who plays a significant role in this and other chapters, shared Althusser's analytic distinction between an account of the production of concepts and a philosophy that inquired into existence. Writing on Kant, de Man defines this as the difference between a transcendental and metaphysical mode of critique. For de Man a transcendental critique inquires into the *concepts* that make being and existence thinkable. Such concepts provide an account of the production of knowledge. Metaphysics attempts to explain why things exist as they do without taking an account of the manner in which it is understood or apprehended. Metaphysics wants an external account of life while the transcendental is wholly "intraconceptual," and remains within the system of knowing. The key difference between de Man and Althusser would be that the former took these two modes to be co-constitutive or reproductive, rather capable of being separated from one another through the structure of a rupture.

[132] Indeed, in an entirely humorous and biting reminder to those Marxist Humanists involved in recuperating young Marx, Althusser states that "it would be very rash to reduce Feuerbach's presence in Marx;s writings between 1841 and 1844 to explicit *references* alone. For many passages directly reproduce or paraphrase Feuerbachian arguments without his name ever being mentioned" (66).

[133] There would be numerous other starting places through which one could approach the *44 Manuscripts* and its production of the concept of species being. Although it became a part of the vocabulary of revisionist debate with the French and Soviet Communist Parties as early as the 1930's, Nick Dyer-Witheford notes that the debate continues today: "species being has been for some time caught in stand-off between humanist Marxists—who love it for its emancipatory *élan*—and structuralist Marxists—who scorn it for residual Hegelianism" (4). Most recently, species being has made a minor return within post-Marxist and autonomous Marxist writing, which attempts to post-humanize Marxism while recentering the development of subjectivity as a terrain of struggle in late capitalism. Dyer-Witheford, part of that tradition, understands species being to denote a kind of vitalist potentiality and the "humanity's capacity to co-operatively change the conditions of its existence […] indeed, to transform its very own nature" (3). Against contemporary assessments of a political economy dominated by enclosures and privatization, Michael Hardt has argued for the persistence of an ontological commons within our

But Althusser's concern with these concepts had less to do with young Marx himself and more to do with the way in which Marx was *read* by Communist Party members of the 50's and the 60's.[134] The substantial portion of *For Marx* dedicated to the "eclectic" mode in which Marxist Humanists read reminds us amply of that fact. Such readings converted Marx's political project into an ethical one in which consciousness and subjectivity became the engine of history rather than the objective conditions of labor elaborated in *Capital*. The early work was most useful for Althusser, then, as an index of the rupture in Marx's own analysis as it broke with an unconscious reproduction of neo-Hegelianism and provided a "total distinction between the idealist dialectic and the materialist dialectic" (12). For Althusser, the early writings could be dismissed for the

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contemporary mode of production, which he derives from the *44' Manuscripts*. Although entirely against Althusser's own conclusions, Hardt recontextualizes the idea of species being through the co-production of affective and immaterial labor, thus insisting upon the immaterial or ideational aspect of species being while rerouting it into the materiality of social relations. Species being thus morphs into the commons in his account as "the results of human labor and creativity such as ideas, language, affects and so forth," in which we can see the tendency of cooperation articulated by young Marx again reemergent in late capitalism. Michael Löwy does not discuss species being by name, but his extensive reading and recuperation of Marx's early writing centers on separating out the more idealist tendencies in which some more abstract entity, either the state or nature, would ensure revolution from those in which Marx begins to move towards a more materialist theory dependent on the formation of the proletariat, the "partial totality [within] this larger totality" (21). For Löwy Marx's humanist ethics can only separated from his scientific analysis at the cost of the social links and "other historical conditions" through which it arrives. And, of course, lastly, species being continues to be defended in more traditional Marxist parlance as an idealist identification between the human and nature the "universal element [said] to unite humankind in a way natural to it" (Czank 319).

[134] Ever attentive to the specificity of historical conjunctures, Althusser opens the English transation of *For Marx* by situating it in the context of divisions within the Soviet and Western Communist parties, writing that "the critique of Stalinist 'dogmatism' was generally 'lived' by Communist intellectuals as a 'liberation.' This 'liberation' gave birth to a profound ideological reaction […] which rediscovered the old philosophical themes of 'freedom', 'man', the 'human person' and 'alienation'. This ideological tendency looked for theoretical justification to Marx's Early Works." The outcome of this project was nothing less than "the disappearance of the class struggle" as the aim of Communism (10,11).

purposes of understanding the development of a Marxist science because it remains within the throes of ideology, in that "its own problematic is not conscious of itself" (69).

Strangely, Althusser's rereading of young Marx produces an uncanny semblance of the problem of reading romanticism. Ranging as widely as Carl Schmitt's *Political Romanticism* to New Historicism, numerous interpretations of Romanticism treat it as a philosophical and literary mode of the production of self-consciousness that obscures the conditions of its production. In other words, romanticism is another name for that confusion of ideology as history, or of history as the product of thought, that Althusser cautions readers of Marx against.[135] The problem that Althusser introduces into a rereading of Marx has to do with this erasure and the ways that it makes thought look like the cause or agent of history, a problem akin to what Celeste Langan describes in Wordsworth as "the contention that the mind, *in addition* to being subject to impressions […] is also the producer of those impressions" (*Romantic* 91). Althusser thus turns out to

[135] A somewhat unexpected theorist of this problem also emerges in Tzvetan Todorov, who historicizes romantic aesthetics as essentially a displacement of the dominant mode of reflection and imitation of nature by one of generation and creation. As he argues, imitation became productive in the shift from the eighteenth century to romanticism, such that art as an object like nature was replaced by the artist's subjective expression of nature. The key displacement here was from one of product to activity, from object to conceptualization. Thus the products of art could be justified and valorized *because,* and not despite, of their arbitrary appearance in relation to nature, which was only proof of its autonomy from the domination of the natural world. We can see here the same terms that crept into Marxist debates in the 60s and Althusser's absolute rejection of what he called the "eclectic" mode of reading taken up by Marxist humanists, which sifted through and divided up Marx's texts in order to emphasize thought over objective conditions. But this account of romanticism also bears affinities with Carl Schmitt's neo-Malebranchean critique and Agamben's recent reinterpretation of the displacement of history into the imagination. In *The Kingdom and the Glory,* Agamben reads the notion of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* as replacement of divine being with conscious human activity. Agamben essentially describes the Marx of the *Manuscripts* as beholden to the kind of natural supernaturalism. Marx thus "secularizes the theological idea of the being of creatures as divine operation" by substituting the idea of God with the idea of human action, thus "[conceiving] of being as praxis" and making "the essence of man [as] nothing other than the praxis through which he incessantly produces himself" (91).

be a strong skeptical reader of such a romantic ideology. The tendency of thought to subsume the material line exists as a continuous concern between critics of romanticism and Althusser's criticism of Marx.

But here I want to argue that Marx might be a romantic in a more radical sense, along the lines of what Forest Pyle has recently called the root of a radical aesthetics. Pyle's etymology of the radical as root suggests a romanticism in which ideology and its limits are produced together. This is a romanticism in which the production of ideology is not a matter to be an analyzed but an event to watch "reduced to ashes or to sighs" (xii), "an encounter registered as undoing, as evaporation, as combustion" (4). Such a romanticism would repropose Althusser's description of a materialism not as a theory that is conscious of itself but as an instance when the production of ideology blows itself apart from within.[136] Such a romantic materialism, or a radical romanticism, takes place when what it means for a theory to become "conscious of itself" leads to an incomprehensible, arbitrary act. (And it might even heretically make out of Althusser a romantic when he gave the performative declaration that made a "rupture" in Marx's work.)

My claim about the *44' Manuscripts* is that it produces such an act, and as with other instances in this dissertation, it does so through a language of life. This language of life is not only an undoing or combustion, but a rebellion of what Marx calls "animal

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[136] Todorov hints at such a problem in the pre-history of romanticism when he describes the field of rhetoric as organized around the following proposition: "All language is potentially figurative, for it is theoretically possible to perceive the form of every utterance; however, it is not an omnipresent and thus non-distinctive property; to say that an expression is figurative is not tautological, because at any given instant we are capable of perceiving the form only of certain utterances and not of all […] An utterance becomes figurative as soon as we perceive it in itself" (93).

needs" or what Andzrej Waminski calls "appetitive existence" against the abstraction of a life in which "everything can be substituted for everything else without distorting the most natural appearances" (de Man *Rhetoric* 255). This disruption deposits a resistance to the smooth contours of consciousness through a material life it cannot master. Locating such ruptures within, rather outside, of Marx's text requires rereading him as a romantic. That is, we must take romanticism as the site of a problematic rather than of pure ideology, as the site where ideology becomes "a concept [that] is itself a volatile effect of romantic discourse [that] calls attention to its own status as a tropological problem inherent to romanticism's primary texts" (Wang 311). In the terms I will offer below, this sense of "attention to its own status" or the perception of language in itself becomes volatile, noticeable, marked in Marx's tautological figuration of life. While the *44' Manuscripts* show us how ideology erases the material in the production of consciousness, they also register the impossibility of complete erasure. Romanticism teaches us how to register the necessity of that gap in the material and the immaterial and to resist the subsumption of the former by the latter. The persistence of that impossibility is material life in the *Manuscripts*.

As Anna Kornbluh has argued, the history of reading Marx has been a history of forgetting that his concepts are inseparable from his rhetoric. Indeed, as soon as we begin reading Marx we find that he asks us to read not his meaning but his language, not the conclusion but the writing.[137] She cautions that we must avoid separating out that literary

[137] As J. Hillis Miller has written, it is through this interest in the production or mode of producing meaning, value, etc. that Marx and de Man are perhaps close. Miller cites de Man's description of the basis of literary theory as that which "can be said to come into being […] when the object of discussion is no longer the meaning or the value but the modalities of production and of reception of meaning and of value prior to their establishment" as a parallel approach to Marx's account of commodities ("Promises").

element from the philosophical or economic, because it is the former that often provides the condition in which the latter are apprehended. Instead we must "begin from the conceit that there is such a thing as aesthetic thinking [that] opens on to the ways in which the text constellates its ideas rhythmically in the tempo of the narrative and poetically in the circulation of tropes" (120). While the *44' Manuscripts* can open up any number of debates over human nature and political economy in Marxist thought, such debates oftentimes seal themselves off from the materials that Marx uses to make the thinking of nature and political economy possible, the language through which he renders the very process of thinking those origins.

Kornbluh asks us to stay with Marx's language not for the sake of the literary, but rather so that materialism is not assumed to be entirely legible, so that it continues to punctuate itself in such a way that it continues to need to be read.

II. Species Being

Species Being [Gattungwesen]: Gattung: kind, genus;
Wesen: essence solid core a human being, Supreme Being, collective or aggregate

Species being is a concept unique to the *44' Manuscripts* and it has a contested history of interpretation. But for my purposes here, its treatment as the residue of an essentializing and abstracting movement in Marx's work is most significant. James M. Czanks' definition of species being is exemplary here: "species being provides a solid core—the universal and essential side of human beings as opposed to the inessential or

abstractness of species-life; it is human substance as against its accidental characteristics" (317).

Species being is the biological side of humanism or the matter upon which telos works. It produces an essentializing distinction between man and animal by way of conscious activity: "It is because he is a species being that he is a Conscious Being; i.e. that his own life is an object for him […] Estranged labor reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his *essential* being, a mere means to his *existence*" (76).

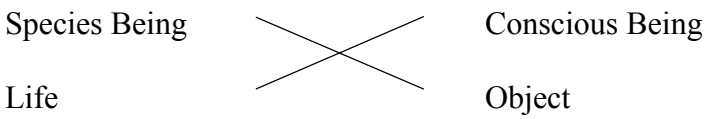
To describe it in these philosophical terms would be to say that species being is the mode of production by which "man reproduces the whole of nature." Species being is not simply metaphor but metonym, as it makes man the cause rather than effect of nature and transcends parts into a whole. Species being designates what Marx calls, in a highly organicist metaphor, a "metabolic relationship" between man and nature. But this metabolism is not homeostatic or equalizing. It yields the surplus of consciousness that comes to displace nature, as we saw above, as the motor or creator of it. Where animals produce only for their immediate needs, man reproduces his surplus above and beyond nature within it. Species being designates an excess or transgression of nature in which the biological becomes social, or in which a generalized substrate organically determines the concrete or particular form. That excess is the substance of species being.

In my terms, and not the terms of its critics, species being has tended to be read as a kind of anthropomorphism. It has been taken as a name for an essential substance to which all particularity is referred, for a metaphysics of which material reality is just a displaced expression. In the terms of deconstruction, species being as described above

can be called entirely anthropomorphic, inasmuch as it converts a set of relations into a metaphysical or *a priori* truth: "'anthropomorphism' is not just a trope but an identification on the level of substance. It takes one entity for another and thus implies the constitution of specific entities prior to their confusion" (de Man *Rhetoric* 241). Whereas tropes threaten constant confusion by endlessly substituting one thing for another, anthropomorphism is an ideology because it presupposes an originary entity—because it assumes a metaphysics. This is why anthropomorphism is not a trope for de Man, but rather an ideology. Read as such an ideology, consciousness will always be retroactively inscribed as the latent content or mysterious origin of objective form. Form is retroactively secured by reference to a preexisting substance.[138]

In keeping with Kornbluh's admonition from above I want to reconsider species being first through the difference of anthropomorphism and trope. We need to return to Marx's definition of species being and attend not to what he says about it but *how* he says it: "It is because he is a species being that he is a Conscious Being; i.e. that his own life is an object for him […] Estranged labor reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his *essential* being, a mere means to his *existence*" (76). To begin again: Marx here figures species being as a chiasmus:

[138] It would be possible to compare this notion of ideology to the origins of a regulatory norm in the context of romantic organicism, one that brings law and biology together in a proto-biopolitical manner. That is, the naturalization of what de Man calls substance can be seen to produces a normative mode for understanding organic life, by linking discrete forms to an invisible but latent telos, or Form, within life. This more regulatory connotation for species being can be seen in Czank's repeated description of it as "a normative human basis" that turns a universal into a form of life. The text to consult on this regulatory organicism would be Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory*.



Species being is Conscious Being, but it is given as an *inversion* or in a *reflexive* relation. The way in which Marx asks us to understand species being is in a rhetorical mode, what Judith Butler described in Hegel as the movement of "partial meaning" that "conveys the elusive nature of the grammatical and the human subject."[139] We could potentially read Marx's definition of species being through an "ontological assumption of linear reading" where the predicate would suggest immediate identity with the subject. That is, species being "is" Conscious Being, a version of tautology. But doing so obscures the way in which this passage calls attention to its rhetorical structure. It would be to ignore the way that its recursive, reflexive movement actually hints at partiality and non-identity—or, in other words, a structure of incompletion. Read rhetorically, the statement above suggests that man becomes a Conscious Being through his biological life as species being; his biological life becomes objectified and returns to him as conscious life. The "is" here is not a site of identity but is rather a "nodal point of interpenetration" in which the difference between species and conscious, life and object, move into relation. As species being, Conscious life necessarily confronts its other in a non-conscious mode. It is a substitution that inverts consciousness, momentarily, with not-consciousness.

If species being is structured as such a rhetorical inversion, then inversion is doubled by of estrangement: "Estranged labor reverses this relationship [between species

[139] Referring Marx back to Hegel here means, of course, that Marx is a Hegelian in the sense that he is a rhetorician rather than a metaphysician. This is to read Marx's Hegel as a Hegel who is always against his own thought, in the tradition of deconstructive treatments of him.

and conscious being].” Estrangement is the alienation of that turn to the “for him” in man’s labor. It is the substitution of essence for existence, the conversion of man’s labor for all into the need to labor only for himself. Like the uncanny, it introduces what Marx calls a “stranger” into the mode of production, the alien power for whom man labors in order to reproduce himself. But estrangement is also a meta-inversion. This will become important below, but for now it should just be noted that estrangement’s reversal already retroactively hints at species being itself as a relation of inversion.

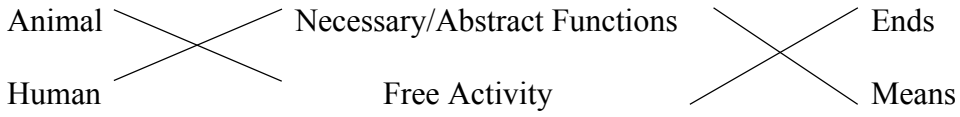
For now we can just say that once we arrive at estrangement, species being gets flipped again, this time in an improper mode. Estrangement inverts in an infelicitous manner. It makes the movement of species being into a repetition of existence rather than producing the excess that is conscious life. The surplus production of species being thus becomes for the moment only, a mere means to ensuring life in objectified form but not “for him.” Thus we have a rhetorical mode that is essential and inessential to man’s life—both, however, are structured as a chiasmus. One movement appears to produce a form of life—species being—while the other appears to produce a ghost, an imitation, an apparition of it.

Chiasmus is not particular to this one passage. That figurative formula is repeated throughout the *Manuscripts* as the figure by which Marx tries to apprehend and realize in language “the major contradiction opposing the increasing *pauperization* of the workers and the remarkable *wealth* whose arrival in the modern world is celebrated by political economy” (Althusser 157). This contradiction appears clear when Marx moves to compare the worker to an animal as he labors under capitalism, and where the animal is not only a sign for material lack but also for the complete poverty of the worker’s world:

> As a result, therefore, man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. *What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal*. Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc. are also genuinely human functions. But in the abstraction which separates them from the sphere of all other human activity and turns them into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal.

Whereas man's essence is free activity, the animal is defined by the immediate ends of reproduction. But as soon as this distinction is made between essence and function it gives way, almost as if the free activity of human functions were only offered "as if." Once we arrive at Marx's statement that "eating, drinking, procreating, etc. are also genuinely human functions" the distinction starts to appear reversible. What defines human functions is something that can both be and not-be animal. What makes man distinctive can be reversed into an indistinction, much in the manner of the excluded inclusion that Agamben has named bare life. The animal serves here as a sign for the human's capacity to be something he is not, an alien other within human that indexes his reversibility. How is it that the essence of man can be so easily confused with animal functions? How does abstraction make free activity *turn* into something else?

This works because what Althusser calls a contradiction above is actually given to us as chiasmus. And chiasmus is a trope not of contradiction, but of equivalence. As chiasmus, Marx's statement might be represented as such:



This statement poses less of an opposition than it does an inversion, less of an account of binaries and more of a movement of turning. In chiasmus, a "pattern is put into motion by a statement […] that reverses the order of the association of the entities and their properties […] The properties of firstness and secondness have changed places, which results in the undoing or the deconstruction of the binary opposition from which we started" (de Man *Aesthetic* 62). Chiasmus takes the figurative shape of an X or a crux, a series of inversions in which exchange happens. This structure shows capitalism to be skilled at deconstruction, as it produces wealth not by the infinite generation of opposition, but through an abstraction in which man and animal or man and thing continually change places. Chiasmus shows these seemingly opposing terms to be mutually constitutive. These contradictory terms can be found within, rather than outside, each other. What might appear to be the pure means of life for man (species being) can be endlessly objectified as the ends of the animal.

In some sense this figuration of animal and human life initiates an early articulation of the commodity form, giving off a ghostly aura, a doubled life. One an object form, the other a form of life, both index an abstraction through which difference

is made commensurate. The animal seems to perform a similar role as the commodity, at least for the purposes of Marx's critique, as the site in which material specificity is erased and the aura of exchangeability is created. Thus, both the commodity and the animal bear form's secret of equivalence in the abstraction of human labor. In this sense, the animal does not only function in a figurative or metaphorical sense, as it might seem. Animal life provides the biological form of real abstraction, the conjuncture of materiality and fetishism that binds the reproduction of life to exchange-value.

This negotiation with animal life and human labor points to that peculiar quality of labor for Marx, which is its capacity to be commodified. Here too estrangement, like commodification, works because species being has an intensely dual nature in that it is both material and social. That is, species being must be essentially, and not only superficially, a capacity for inversion or a chiasmic form. It must be corrupted from within as the potential to be man, animal, thing. Species being suddenly appears as the possibility of continual indistinction from other species rather than what ontologically sets man apart in the evolutionary process. Nick Dyer-Witheford grasps this when he characterizes it as a "nature to change its nature, whose only essence is the capacity for transformation [that] incessantly modifies its own basis" (6). *In other words species being is not an example of anthropomorphism—it is a trope*. Species being names "not a faculty of the mind, be it as consciousness or cognition, but a [system of substitution inherent in language] […] generating partial totalizations within an economy of profit and loss" (Phenomenality 78). While Marx presents the contradiction of animal and human, much in the manner that Althusser proposes the contradiction of wealth and pauperization, to evoke a certain amount of moral outrage, their claims can also be read

in chiasmic rather contradictory mode. As such, they apprehend a seemingly infinite generation of partiality that balances the books of profit and loss and hint at quite the opposite of a moral tenor. Rather than provoke a sense that these processes cannot stand, chiasmus seems to suggest the possibility of endless reproduction. Rather than a condition with natural limits, chiasmus denotes a limitless condition of putting difference in relation to the same. As such, it is a pattern or structure that bears more resemblance to exchange than it does to contradiction. This distinction between contradiction and substitution provokes another doubling of its own. That is, the paradox in which inequality is maintained through a logic of equivalence, in which parts are made into a totality such that nothing is left over in an economy, poses a question about how such a process of neutralized difference comes to be, how what seems so entirely at odds can be made alike.[140]

This logic of substitutability has been an area of convergence for those scholars interested in the overlap between Marx's critique of the commodity form and figurative language. To be sure, the relation I am drawing between chiasmus and the commodity draws from such work. Paramount to the analogy between the linguistic and the economic is the sphere of circulation, which operates as a shared site of equivalence.

If I said above that animal life functions as more than metaphor in the colloquial sense, as more than a figure by which to think of something else rather than itself, then it

[140] In some sense this conceptualization of partial totalizations or an equivalence generated by the abstraction of profit and loss can be expanded as the form of capitalism in general in the Romantic period. In *Romantic Vagrancy*, Celeste Langan describes a similar process in the conjuncture of primitive accumulation and the establishment of credit and debt throughout the period, through which surplus and lack, or "no lack" in her words, were balanced through the mediation of material conditions and the abstraction of an increasingly commodity-reliant economy.

should also be said that it does function as a kind of metonymy for mechanization. That is, animal life, as a life of ends, is an instrumentalized life that presages the mechanical labor that will enable labor's ultimate abstraction in *Capital*. Animal life serves as one of many forms in which human life becomes fixed to that thing against which it tends to be defined, which is the mechanical. Thus, as in much of Marx's work, what is at stake in this distinction, which is really an indistinction as I have said above, is the instrumentalizing of life such that it is without means. But as Jennifer Bajorek argues, this distinction is always a knot in Marx's thought, inasmuch as it is caught between labor as human and labor as life. Labor is always divided from within, for her, as a process of self-making through "the natural, biological, or zoological life of his body" and in what she calls a "cleavage of man and animal" (54,55). Bajorek's reading draws out of later Marx a complex operation that is always splicing and uniting, an operation visibly at work above in his description of estrangement as "an abstraction that separates." Here we are at a point to return to the figurative intimacy of estrangement and species being that I mentioned above. That is, we need to ask how it is possible to locate the difference between the two given that they are both given in the trope of chiasmus. If species being is not an essence but rather its own species of inversion, then what differentiates it, at least structurally, from estrangements' role reversals?

The very fact that species being can be rewritten as a product of history produces an opening within its essence. Elaborated as estrangement, this section produces a temporal-rhetorical problem within the distinction of species being itself. Chiasmic movement displaces its origin in the difference between man and animal and turns that relation into recursion. In chiasmus, the language of species being weaves the other—the

animal—into man. It thus calls for a more tentative encounter with otherness than a treatment of species being as ontological, *a priori* distinction would allow. In this crossing human functions continually risk indistinction with animal, inasmuch as chiasmus forces the crossing over of reproduction as human/means and as animal/function. But then species being and estrangement are also made legible through their inseparability as abstraction and precisely *not as history*. They denote a historical problematic of continual inversion, a process that Warminski has called in Marx only a "mere overturning" that "substitutes a purported materialism for a purported idealism" rather than real difference of a "negativity that cannot be reduced to one, simple, determined negation (Warminski 100, 101). Species being appears turned on its head here, but in a such a way that it is not substantially different or separable from the structure of estrangement. That is, species being and capital share the same basic principle, that of a retroactive logic that deconstructs essence and relies on the infinite exchangeability of difference. Species being, like a certain mode of the production of value, is written as a meaning that is "always in motion, always unsettled" until it is fixed at a later time, not existing in continuity or in existence prior to capitalism's work on it (Clover "Retcon" 22).

This capacity for inversion, what Dyer-Witheford calls species being's "foundationless condition," (6) means that the future anterior mode of species being that ought to secure the future of the human is hijacked by the infinite return of man to its animal origins. This series of inversions contaminates the temporality of species being. It does not denote a fall from a preexisting condition when man produced only as means rather than ends, but a rhetorical predicament in which the fiction of man's capacity for

willful, conscious objectification of nature is continuously stalled by the historical conditions of reproduction under capitalism.[141] Whereas there are moments that seem to revert to political economists' atemporal "fiction of nature" that posit some preexisting substance of species being outside of history, Marx's repeated use of chiasmus throws such linear narratives into disarray. Species being comes to appear more like the infinite capacity for the recursion of estrangement rather than the assurance of its transcendence. The animal as a life of reproductive ends, rather than productive means, is not a reliable index by which to judge the present state of decline or secure predictions of the future. As a rhetorical formation, it is an index of a problem of inversion between *zoe* and *bios*, a problem of understanding how life can be said to constitute a real difference from its own tendency towards abstraction and exchange. Figured as indistinction, species being and its means of life risk equating reproduction and circulation such that neither become visible as sites of real contradiction and struggle. Structured as chiasmus it is hard to see the reproduction of life outside its identification with circulation or its capacity to erase its material particularity.

Indeed, species being fits within a larger genealogy in which consciousness and language come to be understood in a symbolic fashion, as the surplus that man "gains" in return for an originary condition of material lack.[142] This material lack engenders within

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[141] The *Manuscripts* thus begin to figure what Marx will later describe as the struggle over surplus value, with the continual incursions of productive into reproductive time, the paradoxical malleability of variable capital. Inversion is the movement of estrangement within value, of alienation into accumulation, of the subjective into the objective.

[142] Nick Dyer-Witheford's notion of species being as a nature that "incessantly modifies its own basis" and is constantly "founded in a shared foundationless condition" demonstrates that the term is bound up with that longer tradition. Of course the primary reference for it in contemporary thought is Jacques Lacan. On the structure of lack and the distinction it produces between the human and nonhuman, see *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory*. This more general structure in which man designates a fundamental lack or indeterminacy in relation to the

humanist, bourgeois ideology a notion of productivity first at the level of metaphysics, one that Agamben has argued runs parallel to a contemporary discourse of equality, human rights and sovereignty. But the significant difference Marx produces within this larger discourse of surplus and lack is to grasp the economic rather than ethical content of equality, one in which biological life is continuously figured in a relation of exchange and equilibrium. That is, Marx's chiasmic figuration of the human apprehends the structure of lack and surplus to truly be one of equilibrium and balance. Political economists show us this as they go round and round the terms of thrift and luxury, lack and surplus, life and profit. But Marx reminds us that their terms are all the same, "that extravagance and thrift, luxury and privation, wealth and poverty are equal" (96). In chiasmus lack and surplus are put into play in a trope of circulation that leads an incessant movement without resolution. What Dyer-Witheford describes as the "capacity for transformation" thus sits in uncomfortable proximity to the logic of circulation,

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rest of the world is quite long. Such approaches to what I would call a chiasmic figuration of the human, whether of post-Marxist or post-romantic thought, follow in a long tradition of thinking man's condition as one of poverty and lack, stretching from Pascal to La Mettrie, from Fichte to Schelling and Schilling. Marx is directly implicated in this tradition. Indeed, it is hard to read Marx's own statement that "The human had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outside world" (87), without recalling Pascal's own chiasmic formulation that "Man is great because he knows misery" (qtd. in de Man) or La Mettrie's query, "Which animal would die of hunger in the middle of a river of milk? Man alone" (18). Or, even more so, Fichte's remark that, "all animals are complete and finished; the human being is only intimated and projected […] Every animal *is* what it is: only the human being is originally nothing at all" (74). Thus it is not first and foremost that man "has" something that private property takes from him, but rather that an originary and existential propertylessness is what makes him a subject of political economy. In this genealogy of statements man becomes, rephrasing Aristotle, an animal and a sign of lack within political economy. In his reading of Benjamin and Rilke, Patrick Greeney has recently argued that this structure is central to a post-romantic literature that continues to remind us of the "impoverished power" that characterizes the human and its infinite malleability the "that can assume countless other uniforms" (pg). And, lastly, it is precisely this lack that Agamben has argued leads to the overcompensation of consciousness and the association of humanism with an immaterial surplus in *The Kingdom and the Glory.*

positioning life and economics as inversions of a shared "foundationless condition" stake on substitution.

But the "nothing" of man's biological life does gain something in political economy—a movement in which it can be substituted with other forms of life, social, political, animal, etc. It "gains" a calculation of its essential propertylessness, the right to become a commodity, what de Man would call the "economic rather than ethical" character of substituion (*Allegories* 157) and that he would later describe in *Capital* as central to the process of primitive accumulation. Marx's tropological structure for biological life locates it as a thing within a circuit of exchange, in which it gains equality by becoming substitutable with other things. As Althusser suggests, by the time of the *44 Manuscripts* Marx's "was confronted with *political economy* as such" (157). But the relevance of that confrontation has to do with apprehending a certain tropological or linguistic problematic of, on the one hand, the relation between reproduction and exchange and, on the other, an ideology of equality, more than it has to do with the relations of production. Indeed, the peculiarity of the *44' Manuscripts* is their highly tropological movement between the economic, the political and the biological. In them we begin to see the figurative structure that is so central to the totality of Marx's thinking, one in which substitution in an economic sphere can also refer us to equality in the political sphere without making the two identical. This is also, needless to say, what makes reading Marx so difficult and poetic.

This is why Marx fundamentally rejects a socialist or crude communist platform that would demand only equality of wages.[143] Equality is only ever tied to an "imagined universality" and the "logical expression of private property" (83,82). Equality is the political abstraction of commodification, in which everything can be substituted for everything else. It is the mere life of the living body, captured in the wage but, Marx also suggests here prior to *On the Jewish Question*, in a politics of equal distribution. Equality is structured like the wage. It is the reduction or leveling down of labor, of time, of expenditure to the dream of the capitalist economy, the appearance of absolute equivalence for the purposes of exchange. This is the "language of commodities," or as Anna Kornbluh has described it in the terms of a Freudian drive, this is capital as "a universal circuitous motion ultimately indifferent to any object or aim other than the repetitive motion itself" that is "maximally affixed to the movement of circulation" (127,129-9). This is capital as everything and nothing, what Marx captures in the statement: "Political economy starts from labour as the real soul of production; yet to labour it gives nothing, and to private property everything" (79). What this shows us is that there is a constitutive relation between the genealogy of thinking man as lack or as nothing and the surpluses we find in political economy. This relation is not one of contradiction, as it might seem, but is rather the grounds for *equality as substitution*. This relation is not a phenomenological or historical one, but a rhetorical one. This is capital as a balancing act.

[143] On this subject Marx writes, "even the *equality of wages* demanded by Proudhon only transforms the relationship of the present day worker to his labor into the relationship of all men to labour. Society is then conceived as an abstract capitalist" (80).

The most extreme equality is thus enjoyed not by waged workers but by money, which "confounds and exchanges all things." "It is the general *confounding* and *compounding* of all things—the world upside-down—the confounding and compounding of all natural and human qualities […] It is the fraternization of impossibilities. It makes contradictions embrace" (105). Money could no more clearly be figured as the exemplary form of chiasmus here. It confuses and compounds, it intermingles and redistributes—essentially, it enables infinite substitution through its immateriality. Most importantly this structure seems frustratingly incapable of producing a real scene of contradiction throughout the *Manuscripts*, one in which reproduction and production, species being and animal needs, would face each other in negation rather than constantly cross over to cancel out any real difference. If contradiction is what we are looking for in Marx it is not to be found in the work of chiasmus. Inasmuch as chiasmus establishes inequality it does not produce contradiction but rather a "correspondence" by displacing figurative language or fiction into a literal setting, blinding itself to the substitutions it makes in order to claim identity. In other words, money works rhetorically. And it does so in a way that is immanent to the logic of money, through the "transition from qualitative concepts such as needs, passions, man, power, etc. to quantitative concepts involving numbers […]" (de Man *Allegories* 157).

Chiasmus, then, puts difference into circulation through a reification of figure. If Marx has not yet arrived at thinking production as such, then chiasmus at least allows us to see how biological life is transformed into a quantitative concept, through a tropological circuit in which circulation establishes equilibrium through abstraction. Reproduction is figured as circulation in a recuperative process that exchanges material

lack for abstract equality—for the condition of being exchangeable. Species being is certainly within a history of thinking man vis-à-vis lack. But what Marx's chiasmus shows us is that such lack is economical or that it is fundamentally homeostatic. It prompts a balance between lack and surplus. The life of species being is not, then, only a site of surplus. It is entirely bound up with this history of movement, the history of circulation. In that history, human biological life does not yield a surplus but is instead given as an equalizing inversion.

IV. Animal Need, Riotous Life

Chiasmus offers a trope of understanding, a figure of speech, a brokering of similarity amongst differences, equality amongst errors. It renders the seemingly incomprehensible—here the immiseration of the workers' body for the sake of a surplus of abstraction—comprehensible, almost dispensing with the possibility of moral reprehension in the face of such formal perfection. But most importantly, it makes biological life into a trope of circulation. Chiasmus never arrives at dialectical resolution or a point of excess to its exchange. It simply continues balancing the scales in a crossing over, through a rhetorical figure akin to what Langan has called the "balancing act" of economic language that works by translating the material into the abstract.

But needs return as a material force that disrupt Marx's anthropomorphic, anthropological mode and its tendency towards the immateriality of Conscious Being. Needs return life to its disfigured, rather than transcended, appearance. They turn life into a question of when life might appear against itself as an "omnipresent and thus non-

distinctive" form, when it forces us to "perceive it in itself," rather than naturalized within exchange.[144] In this sense, needs perform a rhetorical evasion of understanding in the *Manuscripts*, both enabling and confounding the reading process.

The concept of needs first appears in the *Manuscripts* to distinguish between man and animal. At first we encounter the animal as a sign of irreducible need from which man is stated to be ontologically free: "[An animal] produces only under the dominion of *immediate* physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need" (my emphasis 76). The distinction between the two is temporal. Man is free of the immediacy of animality and his production is already a surplus reproduction. Because man plans and willfully executes his labor, he doubles time and experiences labor as something other than as a feudal animal, under *dominion*. Surplus equals freedom. This surplus distinction is species being and what allows man to produce beyond himself. But as we have seen, such distinction as an absolute one is undone first by the historical fact of estrangement and, second, the chiasmic notion of species being *not* as distinction but as an infinite capacity for indistinction. Marx's own division between animal and man thus becomes a kind of "fiction of nature" that he decries at the beginning as the fallacy of political economy. What we are left with, then, is a temporal knot in which free, conscious labor is rerouted into the domination of "immediate physical need." The freedom of surplus is a fiction Marx tells. But needs also ground the future of species being. In "The Meaning of Human Requirements" Marx returns to need, writing:

[144] This description is lifted and displaced from Tzvetan Todorov's description of the linguistic problematic around which pre-romantic rhetoric was formed. See note 5 above for the full quote.

> It will be seen how in the place of the wealth and poverty [*reichtums und elends*] of political economy come the *rich human being* and rich *human* need [*beduerfnis*]. The *rich* human being is simultaneously the human *in need [bedeurftige] of* a totality of human life-activities—the man in whom his own realization exists as inner necessity, as need. Not only *wealth* but likewise the *poverty* of man—given socialism—receives in equal measure a *human* and therefore social significance. Poverty [*armut*] is the passive bond [*passive Band*] which causes the human being to experience the need [*beduerfnis*] of the greatest wealth [*reichtum*] —the *other* human being [*den anderen Menschen*]. The dominion of the objective being in me, the sensuous outburst of my essential activity, is *emotion* [*leidenschaft*], which thus becomes here the *activity* of my being (91)

Marx begins this paragraph in familiar terms. Wealth and poverty are given as the chiasmus of political economy, as abstraction's equalizing of oppositions. But this now familiar structure of chiasmus becomes something else. Chiasmus is rewritten into an imprecise but prophetic tautology. Terms do not cross over into equilibrium. Rather the balance of political economy (wealth/poverty) Marx ends the first sentence in an awkward repetition meant to signal the future: "the *rich human being* and rich *human* need." This repetition is not structured as an exchange. It is simply an illegible and unmeaning redundancy. While it is close to chiasmus, tautology is not the same and it does not yield the same rhetorical economy here. We have already seen that poverty and wealth are exchanged in political economy through the phenomenal or abstracted relation

of estrangement. Poverty as "misery, suffering, distress" can be formally and figuratively balanced with wealth, as chiasmus shows. Indeed, as Althusser's description made clear it is this "contradiction" that is most recognizable in capitalist profiteering. Like the ghostliness of the commodity, the materiality of poverty exists alongside its abstraction into labor, "through a process that extinguishes its material specificity while generating its value" (Rosenberg *Critical* 23). But while this balancing act is repeated yet again, a different mode of poverty also appears. In contrast to a poverty that registers as suffering and distress, as the material conditions that are somehow both apparent and erased, the third sentence modifies poverty not as *elend* but as need [*beduerfnis*], as "requirement, necessity, want, craving, exigency." In Marx's other tropologies of estrangement, he tends to follow a pattern of inversion. But here there is no semblance of opposition to be either balanced or overcome. Instead of inverting terms Marx becomes momentarily repetitive. This section shifts chiasmus into a performative that pressurizes the appearance of difference polarized by exchange.[145] It may seem that Marx concludes this section by way of chiasmus, by still making poverty into a source of "the greatest wealth," but as I will argue below the reference to need above draws the human and the tautological, redundant structure of animal life from above into proximity.

But to step back for a moment. If we recall, chiasmus mediates opposition not through identification but by putting difference into relation or by "[reversing] the order of the association of the entities and their properties." Chiasmus mediates through movement, not determinate negation. In the world of the political economist, wealth is

[145] This is not the only instance of this shift from chiasmus to tautology. Elsewhere he described species being as "life-engendering life," before going on to distinguish between the immediacy of animal needs versus the willful and conscious needs of man.

magically rendered through the abstract equality established between the immiseration of the worker and the productivity of species being. In the world of political economy one does not ask how equality is produced. It only matters that it is and that its production is seamless. As Marx already understands in the *Manuscript*, political economists cannot tell us how this magic happens because on the face of it they are always performing a balancing act.[146]

Tautology disrupts this abstraction because it introduces what Langan calls a language of language: "tautology is a kind of hoarding associable with the *miser*, who likewise appreciates the *thingness*, rather than the communicative or symbolic function, of the representative object" (73). The miser works to accumulate things that are appreciated in their material specificity, as opposed to the capitalist who will see in material specificity the capacity for cancellation. For Langan, the "thingness" insisted upon is the literality of linguistic self-reference, the sound of its gesture to itself. This gesture offers a different kind of immiseration than that of political economy and the "communicative or symbolic function" required in the exchange of meaning. It is the displacement of language's cognitive, tropological work in favor of its material performance, akin to Tzvetan Todorov's notion that language could be perceived in itself, perceived as utterance. Unlike chiasmus, tautology does not facilitate understanding.

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[146] Despite the many differences between the *Manuscript* and Capital, it seems worth considering that Marx is here engaged with a question about the contradictions that exist between a treatment of biological life/reproduction in abstract and material terms. That is, the structure of chiasmus proposes the possibility of an infinite abstraction of life such that it can also be infinitely converted into a source of capital. And yet as Marx will later show, capital's dependence upon the life of workers for its source of wealth becomes the site of antagonism and struggle, and also an absolute limit to capital's desire to produce without costs or to become entirely self-generating. The way in which life, as need, come to sit both inside and outside of capital as an ongoing process of abstraction is clearly at work here in the *Manuscript* but is significantly most apparent in a rhetorical or figurative mode of thought.

Rhetorically it is closer to the stutter than to the explanation, closer to the letter rather than the figure. Tautology, like the statement "it is obvious," *posits* like a performative and calls attention to the materiality, rather than the meaning, of language.

As tautology, Marx's figure of species being immediately gives away the secret of chiasmus as redundancy elevated to difference. To this extent tautology is ironic, as it points to the unproductive nature of endless substitution that also characterizes circulation. When we arrive at "the *rich human being* and rich *human* need" an uncanny resemblance to chiasmus surfaces, turning back on its structure and reflecting the lack of difference and abstraction through which things come to be substituted for one another. Political economy's chiasmus faces a figure of repetition that gives away its own lack of difference or, in other words, *its structure of equality*. Tautology deconstructs equality as homogeneity and abstraction. Equality thus appears as an absurdist realization of abstract equivalence.

Of course, tautology is intended to be more Hegelian than it is ironic. Marx's irony is famously unmistakable and it is not marshaled here. Read in a straightforward fashion, we might interpret the above as a dialectical attempt to stage an encounter in which the poverty of need is understood, again, as the surplus of human being. Need would be only a temporary holdover in which being recognizes that need can be overcome in labor, thus resolving animal need into Conscious Being and the animal into the human. Material life in such an account would ultimately be converted into an immateriality that poses no real negation to Consciousness, and rather appears as an instance of its own misrecognition. Indeed, Marx means this partial tautology to be a realization of species being in which the lack of the individual indicates the richness of

the universal, in which the negation of need is an affirmation of the surplus of being. Although the case can be made for a formal irony, tautology is more prophecy than it is critique—one that is not meant not to make us perceive the materiality of language but rather hopes to overcome it.

And yet two aspects of this passage complicate such a non-ironic or naturalized use of tautology. First, Marx concludes this passage by referencing emotion and sensuous outburst as the sign of human activity. This passage reinforces emotion not as a movement of outside to inside, or the recognition of what is outside as actually internally produced. It suggests that what is inside moves outward in order to be expressed. Indeed, the displacement of being into need occurs as confusion of self-reference that moves into passive state. Marx defines the totality of human life activities as "the man in whom *his own realization* exists as inner necessity," prompting an ambiguity as to whom the self refers here. Is "his own realization" a product of self or other? Is self-reference an activity of realization or an involuntary movement, a stutter?

This conclusion in emotion might refer us to the problem of "emotionality" that Katrina Pahl locates in Hegel, as an interval of self-estrangement that is never "fully inside or outside." Emotions "travel across and between" in order to produce feeling and "transport Consciousness" (92). In Pahl's reading emotions designate an absolute mediation of Hegel's ethical thought, which is to say a negation that is never done away with, a material moment. Pahl quotes Mark Taylor to grasp the movement of this interminability, comparing emotion to what Taylor calls secretion, "'always *entre-deux*. While the secret is an outside that is inside, a secretion is an inside that is outside" (93). What Marx's passage secretes above is not surplus but emotion, not activity but passivity.

In Marx's language above, however, the movement of emotion "outside" is not just a general need for externalization. It is also figured as a power relation. It is the exposure of the subjective to the "dominion of the objective."

Marx used this phraseology of dominion once before, if we recall, in reference to the distinction between human freedom and animal needs. The latter "produces under the dominion of immediate physical need." Animal needs are subject to the sovereignty of immediacy and the passivity of need. But as emotion even human need appears as passive and under the dominion of the other. Access to what is "inner" is held by an ambiguous objectivity, making the human not a masterful subjective but, like the animal, subject to a force, need, that is beyond the mediation of consciousness. Here need lightly but persistently repeats a resistance to the transcendence of human consciousness. Need begins to appear not in the figure of tautology but with its effects, as a repetition of a materiality that disrupts the phenomenality of self-reference that defines the human.

But unlike Pahl's emphasis on emotion as a process of mediation, Marx's use of *beduerfnis* for need introduces an immediacy. The connotation of *beduerfnis* is not as lack or deficiency (*Mangel*) or as essential (*Notwendigkeit*). Instead, need as *beduerfnis* signifies something posited: a requirement, necessity, an exigency, even a demand. In dialectical terms *need is that indeterminate negation of consciousness*. It prompts misrecognition. What Marx calls human need above returns as animal need, as exigency, immediacy, requirement. Needs are immediate, as animal, and as such remain an asymmetrical feature of what Marx otherwise calls the human. Animal needs as Marx described them before signified a kind of bare life that was meant to be transcended by consciousness: "Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-

activity. It is just because of this that he is a species being" (76). But here it returns as just that kind of basic, mechanical demand of life in the bare and literal function of tautology. Tautology's repetition preemptively shows need to be passive rather than willed. It shows need to be material rather than the staging ground for resolution through understanding. Needs are not an abstract negation of consciousness that will be shaken off and shown to be the latter's own projection. They are a tautology, which is to say an insistence on a literality or what Langan called the "thingness" of language that cannot be transcended as consciousness without reverting to abstraction or immateriality. The exigency of needs, of tautology, is a product of this literality or what Langan refers to as tautology's facticity. Such facticity above is man's relation to the other as a passive bond of need rather than a conscious or willful activity, an irreducibly mechanical aspect of the social nature of labor. Marx's tautological version of transcendence beyond the animal requires animal needs as the materiality of human relations. Needs are thus the heterogeneous condition of possibility for human being that remain untranscended by it.

But what does it mean to approach Marx's notion of species being through tautology rather than chiasmus? In what way might tautology produce a different kind of poverty than that of political economy? Does tautology tell us something about the immediacy of need as a political force, rather than as a reference to bare life or as a way to produce divisions between the human and nonhuman? Without rejecting the model of ethics offered by Pahl and Butler's insistence on mediation, I think that it is worth remaining with the sense of immediacy through which Marx considers animal need. Marx's turn to the animal in certain moments illustrates what Jennifer Bajorek has called figurative language's "privileged relationship to labor and to life" that "can push us […]

in the direction of the animal—which, despite an initial distinction from man by way of labor, is always the figure of the worker and his work" (43). This "push" of needs comes not in the form of chiasmus, but in tautology and its enactment of the lack of language—not the lack of presence but the materiality of language that is lacking in its referential mode. Tautology is the lack that is language in its estrangement from signification—the mark, the letter, the sound. Tautology "(displays) the word's representational *deficiencies*," (Langan 73) showing *language itself to be a continual instance of need*. It reveals that persistent and unrecouperable stutter or negation within life that "cannot be reduced to (i.e. mediated, sublated, into) one, simple, determinate negation" (Warminksi 101) precisely because it is an act of the self-referentiality of language as such.

What I am trying to draw out in this instance is an unconscious or contingent relation forged in the *44' Manuscripts* between "the direction of the animal" and an irreducible, material need it discloses within human life. In this sense, the human would not be the form of life that definitively transcends an animal mode of reproduction. To rephrase Langan, the human would perhaps display its most radical potential in life's conscious or phenomenological deficiencies, in the repetitive and irreducible instance of need. Perhaps, then, the immediacy of animal needs functions as a kind of catachresis within Marx's text, then, or the imposition of the force of language within its abstracting or immaterializing tendencies, tendencies that give it the glimmer of intention. Animal needs call attention to a demand of language expressed as deficiency that cannot be sublated, in other words as "requirement, necessity, want, craving, exigency." Here that negation takes the form of life as material need. Force in such terms is the draw of the external that prompts a radical limit to Consciousness, as something upon which it

depends but cannot master. Faced with force, Judith Butler writes that Consciousness "proves to be interminably partial [and] indicates a negativity it itself cannot grasp" because that negativity sits at the limits of consciousness. Force thus sustains the tension between "that which appears and that which does not appear" (27).

What I am suggesting here is that needs work similarly in the *Manuscripts* as a materiality of life both is and is not a part of the equilibrium operative in political economy, much in the manner that language both is and is not within an economy of meaning. They are "that which does not appear" as a Force within the appearance of the determinate.[147] It is not primarily the temporal sense of immediacy that I find most relevant about the concept of animal needs. Rather, it is their rhetorical force that "pushes" man towards the animal. Outside the equilibrium of chiasmic circulation Marx is pushed in the direction of the animal, with its capacity to introduce the force of need into life.

Here it seems useful to take tautology seriously, as a possible language for human life beyond capitalism rather than as a figure limited to the redundancy through which it structures life. That is, the redundancy of tautology perhaps marks out features of life as exigent need that is incommensurate with reproductions reduction to circulation. After all, what is redundant is both superfluous and excessive, in excess of boundaries but

[147] Needs in some sense figure as animal what Jenifer Bajorek calls the "fatal consequence" to humanism of Marx's later orientation towards nonhuman technics. This "consequence" emerges for her also in relation to the nonhuman, as Marx produces nonequivalent definitions of labor "as a function of the human, and, on the other, his definition of labor as a function of the living body," (47) the latter which she reconciles the mechanicity of socialized labor. Along with the connotations of automation towards which Bajorek's reading of *Capital* directs us, I want to hold onto Marx's articulation of needs as they disrupt abstract equality by way of the posited demands of material life.

without positive contribution.[148] Tautology adds nothing but is beyond measure. This feature of need that Marx previously associated with animal life—that mechanical and instrumentalized life of ends—is a life at the limits of chiasmic circulation, undetermined by its capacity to totalize through partialities and balance by abstracting. Rather than a repetition of the logic of exchange in which the life of species being is captured in Marx above, it seems useful to consider the extent to which we might think the forms and arrangements that intensify life's redundancy, that translate its inversion into superfluity, to neutralize or add nothing to circulation. Tautology seems to provide a figurative limit point to the subsumptive or sublating capacity of abstraction. In other words, it gestures rhetorically to a point at which exchange, substitution, circulation, etc. fails and a remainder of some other capacity of language occurs. This seems useful to me as a way to approach an unconsidered possibility within Marx's writing on life and the future of the human, especially inasmuch as we understand capitalism to determine it.

Needs mark the *Manuscript* with a disfiguring capacity of life, what I have called riotous life in this dissertation. They appear as the nonhuman character of life that within deconstruction would be akin to the "fundamentally nonhuman character of language" and its "in-determinate nature." Like the "catachrestic imposition whose senselessness *marks* […] in advance all subsequent figurations and representations" (Rajan and Clark 12), needs reveal a positing and destructive power by which life marks representations of it. This arbitrary capacity of life to be beyond the economy of its reproduction is not a surplus but a materiality, traced in the fragments and stutters Marx's own attempt to think

[148] Redundant: superfluous, excessive, surplus, unnecessary; marked by needless repetition; etymologically related to something that overbounds; in math, a letter, symbol or other element in a sequence: contributing no additional information

life as abstraction. Needs are the trace of material force in Marx's reading of the life of species being. And the history of romantic reading, which is a history of rhetoric, asks us to take life's disruption as a material event rather than an opportunity to metaphorize or move immediately to figure's regenerative turns. That is, what de Man called disfiguration, that positing machine of language, would ask us to see a life beyond its *figuration as substitution*. This would be to understand that while the tendency of materiality to circulate as ideology is a problematic we inherit from romanticism, along with it we inherit the radical of romantic thought in which the two are bound together in a smoldering relation that is "registered as undoing, as evaporation, as combustion" in Forest Pyle's words from above. It is on this side of Romanticism, with the effects that Pyle describes, that the life of tautology gestures.

V. Conclusion: Tautology, Life, Riot/ous

Here we can again return to Marx and to the disfiguring moment with which I began this chapter: "The eye has become a human eye, just as its *object* has become a social, human object—an object emanating from man for man […] *social* organs develop in the *form* of society; thus, for instance, activity in direct association with others, *etc*.," then, "It is obvious that the human eye gratifies itself in a different way from the crude, non-human eye; the human ear different from the crude ear, etc. etc." (88)."It is obvious…etc., etc." Marx's selection of the eye as the metonymic organ for all organs is certainly not accidental. It is the organ of immanence and vision. This organ sutures together the physical and the phenomenological, giving form to being in precisely the same way that Marx understands the immanence of organs to the "*form* of society." But

Marx makes a quintessentially Romantic move in moving from the eye as figure to the eye as form. Where he wants a symbol of unity he falls back on a trope of knowledge. Where he wants to produce a formal unity he produces a substitution, and a stuttering rather than a seamless one. While the eye is the philosophical lynchpin that should relay form and figure, the sheer insistence of Marx's rhetoric is what stands out here. Perhaps we only realize this once the statement "it is obvious" arrives, but once it does suddenly the rest of Marx's prophetic mode becomes a series of assertions, a set of tautologies that sound more than mean. His stutters halt seamless exchange by separating the referential and the material functions of language. Suddenly language no longer wears the body lightly but divides it between reference and the utterance. Disconnecting itself from the semblance of a fully formed corpus this pause within Marx's larger aesthetic vision empties out the "form of society" in which the world could be an objective and immanent manifestation of human consciousness. Formation is suspended in the interruption of the "etc. etc." In that statement, Marx makes a disfiguring demand rather than attempting explanation.

Perhaps Marx's eye finds its closest counterpart in Georges Bataille for whom the eye was a figure for the threshold, but one of violence rather than of crossing. Drawing human and animal together in his essay entitled "Eye," Bataille wrote that "The fear of insects is no doubt one of the most singular and most developed horrors as is, one is surprised to note, the fear of the eye." "Nothing is more attractive," he continued, "in the bodies of animals and men. But extreme seductiveness is probably at the boundary of horror" (17). Horror, like seduction, does not connote substitutability for Bataille but rather its limit point, where exchange does not maintain equilibrium but verges on

experience freed from it. The eye is a limit figure, then. It is not an indication of forms of life are organized hierarchically through the recursion of man to animal, but a more radical indistinction in which we are seduced by the possibility of letting go of such structures. The eye, in its metonymy with knowledge, has long been an index of what is most human, a sign of man's ascendency over the senses. But the eye quickly becomes what is most nonhuman once separated, plucked out from the human form. Bataille's eye helps us to see that the threshold zone of chiasmus is not only the space of exchange but also the force of the undecidable. Rather, as Bataille suggests, it gives us an image of an instantaneous and uncategorizable image in which something exceeds the metonymic work of substitution in chiasmus. It gives us an image of the "etc. etc." and a figure of life that posits a limit. This is a thing of repulsion and desire, an arrangement of life that makes us desire the disfiguration of its form.[149]

Dissected from totality, such disfigured life functions like a halted sentence. As such it is closer to what Werner Hamacher has called the "afformative" rather than the dialectical unity of social form. Marx's eye and ear and etc. might more properly considered as instances of the "ellipses, pauses, interruptions, displacements, etc. […] "that make utterance possible" than the chiasmus of species being. "The afformative," Hamacher writes, "is the ellipses which silently accompanies any act and which may silently interrupt any speech act" (n. 12 128). Such an instance figures the evasion of meaning in speech through speech itself. Like tautology, the afformative potentiality of language shows the nonsignifying to be a continual mode of language. Its ellipses and the

[149] Michael Taussig describes Bataille's fascination with the eye as an index of a primary repression. The eye is the sign of man's ascendency of the senses, but its visibility also reminds us of how much must be covered over, out of sight in order to produce the human. See "Prologue," *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*.

interruption are traces of a withdrawal from "the field of phenomenality," glimpsed in the offering of speech, an offering that gives something else. This affromative returns us to tautology and what it shows as the contingent relation between language and meaning. Like a utopian version of tautology, language as an affromative traces the unsaid in the saying, the materiality that enables but is not identified with language as history. That this arresting takes place in the context of chiasmus is significant, as otherwise its indistinctions have facilitated movement or what I have called exchange. Marx's stutter within anthropomorphic form introduces a different valence of chiasmus in which human and nonhuman life also appear in contingent relation, overdetermined neither by consciousness nor the guarantee of infinite substitution. Life in this instance appears capable of offering a difference from the law that "[preserves or mandates] certain forms of life" (110) or an exception to the form of life given as exchange and equality through chiasmus. These interruptions in Marx's negotiation with life hint not at the indistinction that keeps bare life operative "as substitution" but at what Hamacher calls a "'deposing'" quality of life.

Hamacher's consideration of the affromative potentiality of language is prompted by Benjamin's elaboration of the general strike: "This strike, directed towards the annihilation of state violence by way of suspension of all positing violence—in other words, directed towards *nothing*—can be described as being without intention" (120).[150]

[150] Another useful consideration of the mobilization of an aporetic structure of life and politics that Hamacher designates through the notion of suspension here is Ewa Ziarek's discussion of British suffragettes hunger strikes, which functions as a "usurpation of the sovereign decision over mere life […] suspends the current law, at least on the symbolic leve" (101-2). She further elaborates upon the emancipatory possibilities for thinking bare life from the perspective of collective struggle, writing that by "refusing to act; [the hunger strike] collapses clear distinctions between passivity and activity, actuality and potentiality, victim and enemy. On the one hand, the hunger strike repeats, mimics, and exposes in public the hidden, irrational violence of the

But in thinking the relation between life and language, perhaps this "being without intention" can also be usefully formulated through the relation between needs and tautology. Hamacher's gloss shows that the "without intention," the very description that Marx uses to describe animal life, has a political mode that cuts to the heart of the law that mediates life's commodification as labor. In both Bataille and Hamacher, then, we can locate a genealogy in which the *Manuscripts* minor interruptions of needs, of the animal, of the etc. intensify the nonhuman qualities of human life as a limit to economies of abstraction.

But I want to conclude by suggesting that the event with which Marx's tautology shares the most is not this general strike but the riot, or even what Anna Tsing describes as the riotous, which is determined by a limit to reproduction and life. Rather than the general strike's determination by production, the riot and the riotous evoke an annihilation of state and capitalist violence today precisely through the problem of the unintentional and undirected, through a meeting of the contingent nature of capitalism and the endpoint of organized political forms.[151] Anna Tsing has recently invoked the term "riotous" as a way to describe the possibility of human and nonhuman survival amidst the destruction of "capitalist ruins." Tsing means riotous in a highly figurative way, as the possibility of an unexpected turn within life that proposes "open ended

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sovereign state against women's bodies. On the other hand, by usurping the state's power over bare life, the 'nonact' of self-starvation negates women's exclusion and calls for the transformation of the law" (100).

[151] Ever since the publication of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* a whole bibliography of texts have sought to grapple with this end of organized political forms, including most recently Jodi Dean's *Crowds and Party*; a series of publications by the Endnotes' collective, the most recent of which is *Unity in Division*; Joshua Clover's *Riot. Strike. Riot*; Hardt and Negri's ensuing texts; Paul Mason's *Post-Capitalism: A Guide to our Future*; and Nick Srnicek and Alex William's *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work.*

entanglements of ways of being." She locates these modes most explicitly in spaces where "the problem is that there isn't any capital. There is a lot of money changing hands, but it slips away, never forming an investment" (82). Tsing implies that these spaces, abandoned by capital, might demonstrate ways of living that are already outside it, even if these also indicate the "noncapitalist elements on which capitalism depends" (66). But Marx's text seems riotous in a different way. It asks us to approach life in a more performative mode, which is to say as the possibility of an event within life. Need asks us to think of life in terms of a destruction not only enacted upon but enacted by, the nonhuman as a force of destruction rather than the regenerative contingencies of a mushroom.[152] The force of animal needs in the *44' Manuscripts* refer us to the disfiguring rather than the figurative capacity of biological life. Joshua Clover's recent take on the contemporary relation between reproduction and capitalism is quite different. As he understands them, the life involved in the riots is one entirely mediated by capitalism and the seeming limits of production today. Riots take place within the sphere of circulation, where racialized and gendered bodies are historically and increasingly pushed to find the means of reproduction because they are barred from waged labor. The riot thus takes place in the sphere that Marx later reveals in *Capital* as the Achilles heel of classical political economics, the space of exchange where everything takes on the appearance of

[152] This distinction seems significant to me inasmuch as it proposes radically different ways to conceive of history. For Tsing, the matsutake represents a form of life that is already outside of capital. It stands in for a surplus has emerged despite of or in the waning of capitalism, which as a system she reads as reliant on waged labor and industrialized production. But there is another way to read that form of surplus life which is as more of a threshold within capitalism. Much work would testify to the surplus populations and life necessitated by capital's shift from an industrial to a financialized mode. From a perspective in which surplus is still entirely within the logic of capital, our analysis of history would have to resist hoping for an outside form immanent to it. We would have to reorient ourselves to an analysis that still looks for limits without confusing those with the future.

equality and no surplus can be accounted for.[153] It is in this space that material needs demonstrate the failure of exchange to completely sublate them, to internalize them entirely and without remainder into capitalism. They occur where life is forced into the "value-relation of commodities" through "equivalence or interexchangeability, like the equivalences established by a metaphorical system" (J.H. Miller 5). Riots take place within the operation that aims towards a chiasmus that cannot account for them. This is, of course, an entirely ambivalent point.

Between Tsing and Clover there emerge two related but distinctive modes of the riot/ous and life. Both involve the increasingly apparent limits of capitalism to reproduce itself by providing for the material needs required to reproduce entire populations, whether those are human, as in Clover's case, or human and nonhuman, as in Tsing's. On the one hand, Tsing takes up a riotous life as it is left over in the eradication or collapse of capitalist circulation in certain spaces. In this sense, the riotous designates modes of reproduction that remain after immense destruction, what she ironically calls "after progress." On the other, Clover suggests that capitalist circulation may be the space in which a capitalism post-surplus value does not mean a post-capitalist zone, but a world in which surplus populations *are* the leftover of productive capital. While these arguments on the riot/ous are odds with each other analytically, they converge in assessing a contemporary without surplus of a certain kind, understood in the first case as financial resources and in the second as value.

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[153] Much could be said here about the correspondence between Marx's reading of circulation and deconstruction's reading of trope. Both are concerned to locate the element that sits inside and outside of a system of exchange or the "logos, the element outside the game of exchanges and yet within it, by means of which all things come to be measured" (Miller 6).

This is where the figure of tautology in the *44' Manuscripts* becomes most interesting to me, as a figure that puts material needs and nonhuman life in a limit relation. Thus, Marx's division between the human and nonhumam vis-à-vis immediate, animal needs that returns to haunt human needs perhaps approaches this limit to which Tsing and Clover point us, a limit at once induced by capital and to its abstracting operations. At such a limit point, where reproduction is divided from exchange and value, it perhaps becomes possible, even necessary, to see the redundant and superfluous as forcing the demands of the future. Hence, tautology. If tautology refers us to what is unincorporated and left over in the surplus production of language, then it not only reminds us of something irreducibly unsubsumed in that process that remains within it, but also of a language by which we might be able to begin to think of life beyond circulation, if only through the persistent repetition of material needs that can no longer be covered over in processes of substitution. Tautology thus gives us a language that is immanent to contemporary economic and ecological conditions. In its limit function, tautology suggests not only the limit at which capitalism is no longer able to subsume reproduction under production through exchange, but also as a figure for the impossible demand of needs in the moment. It is in this sense that I seek to read the *Manuscripts* designation of needs in a nonhuman fashion, as those redundant and non-conscious material demands that show up in the tautological repetition of the rich human being and the rich human need.

Marx's chiasmic exchanges trope circulation. But chiasmus ultimately fails to make material need entirely legible, as need is not reducible to exchange. Needs as we see them occur in the *Manuscripts* are a force and not a form, a thing rather than an

abstraction, tautology rather than understanding. What continues to be significant about this rhetorical difference within *44' Manuscripts* is that it appears as concerned with biological life and reproduction as it is with production and labor. And life does not only appear in circulation in the *Manuscripts*—it also marks a force. This force is what de Man has called disfiguration or the power of language to posit itself in its materiality, against the specular and immaterial abstraction of the phenomenal. Disfiguration is a violence within the mistake of taking circulation for reason. And disfiguration, materiality, tautology give us a way to stay with the illegibility of need rather than to move immediately to understand them through abstraction. Animal needs continue to return in Marx's text as the possibility of material life. That possibility is registered as a force within the abstraction of life as substitutable. Thus it will always appear, as de Man's describes, as the as a "random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence" (123).

Clover's recent description of the general logic of the riot can perhaps serve, in closing, as a way to *see* needs as such a materiality rather then to try and *read* them. That is, his account of the riot is where Marx's rhetoric finds correspondence. Riots, in his words, are a "desperate turn to the question of reproduction […] as negation" (*Riot* 29). They occur within the "noisy sphere of circulation" as a disruption of circulation or when life is pushed into circulation, rather than production, in order to reproduce itself. Riots are the product of an explosion of need against the attempt to satisfy them through the abstraction of exchange. In the riot, needs appear as a tautological insistence on the sheer "thingness" or literality of life.

Like the animality of needs, riots are waged outside of labor and what Marx calls "conscious life-activity" driven by the immediacy and demands of a life that has been historically dispossessed of access to the hegemonic mode of reproduction. Riots work on "a terrain" that rioters "have neither made nor chosen" and "lacking in rationality, unsovereign, socially determined but not determining, not fully human" they "[feature] participants with no necessary kinship but their dispossession" (16).[154]

The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* consideration of animal life moves towards this terrain of the riot rather than the strike, positing needs as a disfiguring force within a general economy of substitution. Such life persistently negates that abstracting economy, which Marx also links to the political concept of equality and a vulgar communism of wage labor. Animal life, and its correlate concept of need, gives us an interesting vantage point on the duality of redundant, tautological thing of life that archives both a mode of exploitation and resistance. Marx's conclusion of the first half of *Manuscripts* in a section entitled "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society" gives all the more reason to take the materiality of tautology seriously against the abstracting power of chiasmus. This section indulges chiasmus heavily as the figure money's capacity to transform all sensuous and material particularity into exchange value. At the level of circulation, money is shown to render any contradiction into indifference, thus making the world a site of formal equality instead of incommensurability. Thus, Marx

[154] As Clover notes, here it is important to distinguish between reason and nonreason, sovereign and nonsovereign as they structure the logos of capital and the state. That is, adhering to these descriptions is not the same thing as affirming the moral and ethical judgments that underlie a long history of racism and a larger history of the violence of "othering" within Western thought. The point instead is to see the limit point in this terminology where it not only breaks in the unsustainability of its binary but also where we can glimpse a desire for freedom from it by not attempting to recuperate it.

again shows contradiction to be an ambivalent critical term, inasmuch as capital subsumes all relations through a logic of exchange:

> Money is not exchanged for a particular quality, a particular thing, or for any particular one of the essential powers of man, but for the whole objective world of man and nature. Seen from the standpoint of the person who possesses it, money exchanges every quality for every other quality and object, *even if it is contradictory*; it is the power that brings together impossibilities and forces contradictions to embrace (105)

Indeed, the establishment of money as a currency through which all commodities, including labor, can be exchanged ensures that money can live the life, personified, that human workers are denied. Money is the ultimate chiasmic agent that "confounds and exchanges all things, it is the general confounding and compounding of all things—the world turned upside down—the confounding and compounding of all natural and human qualities" (105). As Michael Hardt has argued, Marx's corrective to this condition is an affective and singularizing one of love, in which "Marx proposes that love, in contrast to money, operates through proper exchanges, and thus maintains the singularity of our human powers" (679). But even here Marx ends up figuring man as repetition: "If we assume man to be man and his relation to the world to be a human one, then love can be exchanged only for love, trust for trust, and so on." In the end, Marx's rhetoric perhaps asks us to approach repetition and redundancy in its radical mode, as a mark of material needs at the limits of any exchange economy. This at least has been the potential effect of Marx's rhetoric that I have been trying to understand here.

I cannot yet say how this correlation between the human and nonhuman, the human and animal life that I have been tracking through chiasmus and tautology might bear on Marx's later work. But as Langan notes, tautology certainly does appear in later Marx, where "the economy is structured like a language whose logic is that of tautology" in which "repetition produces a totalization greater (and less than) the sum of its elements" (61). Such repetition, as I have argued here, perhaps indexes a nonhuman, if not animal, quality that persistently undoes the equality of totalization in Marx's writing. If history is given as a self-fulfilling formation, then needs consistently appear within the *Manuscripts* as an instantaneous deformation, as a persistent gap within the reproduction of life. Needs are the material element within life that can be abstracted, or in deconstructive terms phenomenalized, in the production of an ideology but that will continuously return to dismember it. They pose a limit internal to the abstraction of life, the zero point of materiality that cannot be done without losing life to abstraction entirely.

Young Marx's formulation of species being as a problem of chiasmus and inversion provokes urgent questions about a return to theorizing reproduction today in the context of climate change and what Jason W. Moore has called the "capitalocene." If we take Marx seriously in his figuration of the life of the human as it is structured through an indistinction, rather than a contradiction, with animal life, then getting beyond capitalism is not a matter of resolving the latter and finding ourselves in an entirely transformed world. It may instead now be the work of intensifying the relations of reproduction in which the productivity of distinctions have already given way. If in young Marx we can see the nascent formation of capitalism through a certain kind of indistinction as a result

of abstraction, then his own formation of the essentially inscriptive or modifiable relation between human and nonhuman, between consciousness and reproduction perhaps gestures towards that space as the one in which to struggle over life, such that reproduction could no longer be the division through which the unity of production occurs.[155] There are many reasons to think that this division is already imminently eroded, Marx's writing has the virtue of posing this destruction as a process of formation too.

VI. Coda

Marx's early writing has been either dismissed or recuperated on the basis of its relationship to the historical context of the formation of an organized workers' movement that would be conscious of its own problematic, as Althusser would say. For Althusser such awareness was the unmistakable as the trigger for Marx's rupture from humanism and German idealism:

> this retreat from ideology towards reality came to coincide with the discovery of a radically new reality of which Marx and Engels could find no echo in the writings of 'German philosophy'. In France, Marx discovered the organized working class, in England, Engels discovered developed

[155] This aim is part of Agamben's concluding gesture of the *Homo Sacer* series, *Forms of Life*, in which he suggests that something like the discrete ways in which we live and reproduce, e.g. in different modes of labor, should not be divided from a more ecological, metabolic and even biological means of living. Nonetheless, as so often is the case with his work, Agamben's notion of history and eschatology make it such that it is almost impossible to understand the process by which these divisions might come together in the kind of non-sovereign unity he desires.

> capitalism and a class struggle obeying its own laws and ignoring philosophy and philosophers (81).

This historical context produces the crucial cipher by which to separate Marx' writing as ideology and as science. In a sense, it is the move from organization on an organicist plane to an explicitly economic plane that allow for this distinction, the shift from a concern with nature to a concern with production.

Against Althusser's division between these phases, Michael Löwy has argued for more continuity, stressing that Marx's earlier humanist phase is what enabled him to have a more-than-economic argument for the proletariat and the social nature of communism. It is the content of alienation, in fact, that prompts Marx to consider the proletariat as the subject of revolution for Löwy. It is first the ethical and social phenomenon of dispossession that first leads Marx to consider the historical force of material dispossession. Nonetheless, Lowy argues in a somewhat developmentalist and teleological fashion for the formation of the proletariat as a kind of category that, once arrived, remains the Subject of history. "There lies all the difference," he writes, "between the urban *plebs* of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, a heterogeneous and imprecise category wherein poor craftsmen, journeymen, hired hands, lower clergy, unemployed vagrants, etc., are all mixed up together—and the modern proletariat which begins to take shape in the 19th C. It is only with the appearance of this class, after the Industrial Revolution, that the structural foundation arises for a coherent and rigorous conception both of communism and of self-emancipation" (18). In both accounts, one against, one for Marx's humanist moment, the historical movement towards

industrialization and the formation of the working class is the determinate event by which to read Marx's early work.

As I have been trying to argue, however, perhaps there is a different context in which to think the relevance of the *Manuscript* and that it is perhaps Marx's rhetoric of life that opens up the possibility of this other context. Althusser's own historical conjuncture seems less hegemonic today, and along with it the emphasis on a "coherent and rigorous conception both of communism and of self-emancipation," which was enabled at some point by what seemed to be the subsumption of labor into wage labor. Today we need to return to Marx's early writing not to judge its relationship to production and the working class, but to reproduction and dispossession. As I have been trying to argue above, the *44' Manuscripts* allow us to see a disruptive and riotous life that emerges in the interchange of reproduction and exchange, in material life and its abstraction. Returning to the *Manuscripts* would be one way to begin rethinking the role of subsistence, bare life and reproduction within Marx's own work. But it also points us back to Marx as a romantic and how the rhetoric of romanticism is bound up with an ability to read, today, the role of force and its dispossession of consciousness as a feature of politics. Rhetorical reading suggests that there is no judgment to be made of such force but only an analysis of the facticity of its appearance within a contemporary ideology of life.

Perhaps Marx encourages us to move between these two readings of him. Indeed, he offers two geo-physiological allegories within the span of three pages, inviting us to consider them as different potential histories operative in his text. First Marx writes an epigenetic and teleological history: "The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the

entire history of the world down to the present" (89). This formation is immediately figured as a *legible text*: "It will be seen how the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry are the open book of man's *essential powers*, the exposure to the senses of human *psychology*" (89). History is this coming into existence or formation of the objective world as expression of human psychology. Next: "The creation of the *earth* has received a mighty blow from *geogeny*—i.e. from the science which presents the formation of the earth, the coming-to-be of the earth, as a process, as self-generation. *Generatio aequivoca* [spontaneous generation] is the only practical refutation of the theory of creation" (91). If Marx asks us to read the human as a book, then this next allegory of reading reminds us that its legibility is punctuated throughout with its own absence of understanding, with the persistent and indeterminate negation of consciousness by life. Marx's text of a text erupts or is interrupted from within, like the spontaneous generation that arrives after the section on the rich human being and rich human need.

In this moment life is no "mere overturning" or inversion of consciousness' determinate hold on formation. Marx's fragmented instances provoke a life that posits and disfigures, in rhetorical terms. This interruptive and tautological rhetoric are the product of animal needs. Both transition us from figure to disfiguration, chiasmus to its disruption. When Marx invokes life as a force it works as what Andrjez Warminski describes as a "reinscription" in which "real life determines consciousness in a way that consciousness cannot master" and "that cannot be reduced to (i.e. mediated, sublated, into) one, simple, determinate negation" (101). Such instances of reinscription, he

reminds us, are what demand a continual rereading of Marx in the afterlife of Communism, of Althusser, of production.

Coda: Romanticism, Reproduction, Destruction, Today

This project began with a sense that negation is Romanticism's most contemporary mode. Not a negation of that is apocalyptic or purely epistemological, but of the political kind most recently evoked in images of riots, of a kind that renders life and destruction, almost unthinkably, inseparable. In recent years, these images appear on TV screens and newspapers, as moving or still frames of littered remains. The difficulty of reading and interpreting what remains in their wake has everything to do with the intimacy between life and destruction that riots, as exceptional events, evoke. The peculiarity of riots, as others have noted, is that they make life, at least human life, its needs and reproduction into an immediately and exceptional political matter. And yet, this exceptional, unthinkable intimacy in the case of the riot can be inverted. Instead of the exception, it can also be read as the general reproduction, the negative dialectics, of an unequal and exploited life that today defines political struggles. Typical media responses to riots are exemplary here, in that they are oftentimes treated both as the product of a long span of decline and as an exceptional instance of biological life's, what is often characterized as nonhuman life's, destructiveness. Thus, the difficulty of reading riots is that life's negation can appear as both political exception *and* a general condition, in a chiasmic formation. Shelley's "forms of living death," in his "Sensitive Plant" perhaps pose the exemplary figure of the political, as they can be read as both form and event, as condition and exception. This paradox of life's immanent relation to destruction defines my reading of Romanticism, along with its (very contemporary) tendency to figure that relation as a remainder.

The question of how to read the remainders of life's instantiation as destruction is a thoroughly Romantic one, as I have argued here. For instance, as I proposed in the introduction, Percy Shelley's "Triumph of Life," is a signature text that renders remainders into surplus forms. But one could think about more canonical texts I have not discussed in this project, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the destructive force of the monster's needs, which seem entirely excessive to Victor Frankenstein, that are incorporated into a body from the remains of other bodies. Perhaps an even better example is Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, which writes the narrative of the last human life. It is easy to mistake the central character as the remainder of an apocalyptic, worldwide destruction in that novel, but it is really the narrative itself that serves this function. Framed for readers as prophecy but written by the central character as history, Shelley's text translates the future of life into a remainder of the past.

This project contends that these and other Romantic representations of the destruction of human life, which are consistently figured through nonhuman remainders, continue to structure our central political problematic. Romanticism's presentation of the nonhuman as both a limit term to the human *and* its most base form, as a negativity from which human life is inseparable, constitutes the knot through which political theory continues to operate. More complicated still is the fact that Romantic translations of negation into a nonhuman force underlie liberatory and oppressive, utopian and dystopian, politics alike. For instance, Coleridge's treatment of mechanical bodies and the food riot, in which the mechanical operates both in the construction of a hierarchy of life but also as a quality of time forced open by the demands of biological life, expresses at once a regressive and revolutionary position. This Romantic indistinction vested in the

nonhuman, and its differential destructions, demonstrates that how we read destruction matters. It has been a central focus of this dissertation to pull apart the implications of those differences.

To clarify how such difference continues to matter today, we could take the contemporary example of the Great Recession. One way to take apart the destruction of the Great Recession is through a critique of neoliberalism, in which privatization and a lack of government regulation, specifically of the finance sector, is to blame. Such a "deconstruction" makes it easy to exit the destruction, in a sense, through recourse to a full redemption of a past of social welfare, wealth redistribution, and consumer protections. Such a taking apart provides a clear route from collapse to reconstruction, through a path we think we can already affirm. And, in a certain way, life gets to remain separate from destruction in this account, through the possibility of a return of a prior organization of social life. This response also preserves a division between social reproduction, or life, and the economy, where former is not integrated as the prime cause of crisis in the form of debts transacted for social reproduction.

The second, more circuitous path would be through the following mediation, which suggests no exits but requires an affirmation of the riot's rubble. This other way would be to recall that at the backdrop of Baltimore burning in 2015, the response to Freddie Gray's murder, was another scene of finance. This scene makes life, as debt and indebtedness, a very particular crux of collapse. The backdrop to those days of riots is the fact that more subprime mortgages were signed over to African Americans in Baltimore than almost anywhere in the U.S. This fact collapses and explodes the concept of debt that is central to finance, accumulating beyond the household and into the gaping absence

of reparations on which state violence is constituted. Here the remainders of a CVS and of police cars, of trash cans and storefront windows are doubled in the specter of unpayable debts that offer no exit through the past. Like the trace of rebellion preserved in Stedman's translation of the marroon refuge, *Boucou,* as moldered, these remains are signs of a necessary negation of negation, not the possibility of return. Both intern a history from which there is no escape. One version of destruction looks back to what can be reconstructed, reconstituted as continuity, another to the constructions that might be possible by staying with the life that is continuously taken apart. Writing about the figure of Black life, Achille Mbembe provides an apt caption for this second constellation of life and destruction, this scene of riots, as "The Remainder—the ultimate sign of the dissimilar, of difference and the pure power of the negative" (11). Such remainders are more than sites of mourning. They are figures of an immense accumulation of crisis that runs deeper than one that could be midwifed by the State, what for Mbembe figures the constitutive of ambivalence of the future of politics. As he writes, it may be that we cannot "lay the foundation for something new" without holding onto that Remainder, and its "luminous, fluid, and crystalline character […] constantly skirting the edge of the frame" (7).

Romanticism helps us to read the demands of such remainders in their constitutive excess, without which, as Mbembe suggests, we cannot have a politics. Romanticism's limit forms of mechanical, vegetal, and animal humans are part of a longer genealogy of a life that skirts the frame, one that crosses over between the negative and the new, the blindness and the insight, as images of riotous lives do again today. Staying with the remainders of these figures, in their Romantic and post-Romantic mode, is a way to insist

that beneath what registers as a visible, even a universal destruction, there is always a more particular one. This brief and albeit oversimplified reading of the contemporary demonstrates that while it is saturated by negation, there are differential destructions to be made between within the politics of life.

The Romantic literary, or rhetorical, tradition continuously stages such remainders in a way that brings this difference of destruction into focus. This is in part because Romanticism is the site in which the histories of violence (capitalism, colonialism, etc.) that continue to haunt us today have their modern origins. But it is also through its more philosophical and rhetorical mode that Romanticism continues to have a hold on a politics of the present. This is Romanticism's foundational gesture of constitution or, in other words, of positing: of Revolution and the "I," of the future and of the origin. Positing is at once an act of negation and surplus. It is the conflicted the condition of possibility that cannot be accounted for or taken up in the story that will be told about it, a story that seeks to be identified with the instance with which it cannot be identical. It is always, in this sense, a limit point that is repressed and repeated as the uncertainty of the reproduction of the same. Romantic acts of creation, regeneration, and reproduction are never without a trace of what is left over from that act, a trace that persists between the then and the now. This trace is another name for a materiality that constitutes but is excluded from understanding. Philosophers like Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and, quite differently, Roberto Esposito argue that this constitutive non-identity that is the condition of possibility for social life—for language, community, subjectivity. What remains beyond and fragmented within our relations to each other makes those relations. Romanticism's positing mode brings us back to an

insistent intimacy between life and destruction structured as remainder, as what must be understood as internal to rather than left over from a process. These readings remain limited in their capacity to produce new political forms. But I take the negativity they propose as a radical difference, as what is most constitutive of *and* excluded from, to a world that de Man described as a shelter for the human, by which he meant a shelter for humanism. That difference is a capacity. The irreducibility of what is posited and what is known, of the material and the phenomenal, allows us to think a relationship between life and destruction that is more than historical. It designates a survival *without* identification and, thus, of a possibility that politics can do more than affirm what exists. Although an outlier to Romanticism, Leopardi's "La Ginestra" is an excellent case in point here, as a poem that takes what is left over, or even expelled, from humanist versions of history as the condition for a solidarity that can be seen to extend to the ecological, through a reciprocal relation of remaining.

Romantic positing shows us it is only from within destruction that surplus derives. And while the mechanism of such surplus production remains underdetermined in Romanticism (is it language, secularism, existence, labor, etc.?), this insight has remained central to political theory since. Romanticism's insights, if they can be called such, into this paradoxical derivation return clearly in the context of Marx's account of value through exploitation, or even in the emergence of populations as a mechanism of governance in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Romanticism's representation of surplus as a remainder can be read in Marx's own account of surplus, where its political significance is not surplus as such or as a noumenal form, but as a way to trace the limit-form of capital. It is perhaps the fact that Romanticism locates that problem of surplus'

negative conditions from *within* life, rather than within the economic or the historical, that we have yet to fully come to terms with it. While entirely ambivalent, Romanticism's concern with positing, or with performativity, creates the negative ground on which such surplus is structured, meaning that there is always a limit point or outside inscribed from within. This Romantic problem, that destruction rather than affirmation is site of surplus, not of pure scarcity or finitude, is the central contradiction upon which aesthetics, political economy, and history has worked since the eighteenth century. It is from within this problematic of the remainder as figure of limits and surplus that we continue to pose questions about the historical and the economic, about populations and wages, and about race and biology—about the present.

One could think here too of the function of differential destruction by considering the Endnotes Collective's recent critical description of the "figure of the *male, semi-skilled, heavy industrial worker*" in contrast to Shelley's decaying plants. Where the former once signified a potential "tipping point" of history "that became hegemonic in the course of the workers' movement" and "a model for the rest of the class: what it could be, what it was becoming" (6:6), the latter as I read them disfigure such hegemonic models, drawing attention to the undoing of sovereign figures as the grounds for a history in which revolutionary and hegemonic narratives are decomposed. The one offers a redemptive eschatology while the other, the plant, as Leopardi also makes clear, asks us to think transience rather than transcendence as a political force. One enmeshes life in the history of colonialism and primitive accumulation and the other in industrial-era exploitation. One turns eschatology into earth, the other into machines.

These figures, which constellate different kinds of destruction within them, demonstrate that the limits life can or might impose on history differ drastically, and that the tea leaves we read to predict it can draw us either towards the future or the past. Turned this way, figures always become disfigurations by turning life into signs of limits that we continuously try to read. It is because it is still necessary to make recourse to this fundamentally allegorical and nonhuman understanding of human life, because we cannot represent reproduction without an excess that is nonhuman, that Romanticism remains politically significant today. Powerful as they are, allegories dehumanize or, to invoke the terms of my project, disfigure, inasmuch as they ask us to read life for a possible difference between a sign and its meaning, a difference that might posit a limit to history. Romanticism inaugurates such allegorical, nonhuman treatments of history that are central to Marx, to Benjamin, and, in different ways, to de Man's projects. Blake writes in this allegorical mode in "Auguries of Innocence," where a prophetic litany of nonhuman animals serve as rebuses both for a long history of human violence *and* the divine perspective through which it might be ended. The challenge that such a Romantic nonhuman history puts to us, then, is not to avoid destruction but to continue reading it, in order to resist the tendency to homogenize it, or to attribute its force only to capital, or alienation, or what Benjamin called the victor's history.

As the above hopefully makes clear, it will not be primarily through its *representations* of social and economic destruction that Romanticism remains relevant today. Rather, it is through the more negative force of disfiguration that Romanticism gives us a political ground, through its forceful attention to what limits life's identification with, as Benjamin put it, "what happened" as history. This, at least, is the

reason I find more traction in Shelley's "The Sensitive Plant" and "Triumph of Life," rather than in "Masque of Anarchy," for instance, or in Leopardi's "La Ginestra," instead of his "All'Italia" or even his "Risorgimento." These poems have at their core a negotiation with materiality as what remains from the violent abstraction of life as understanding and as a figure for progress that demands continual affirmation. It is this insistence on the materiality not only as what remains from processes of destruction, but as the trace of contradictions that led to an event we call destruction that we can affirm. Romantic writers grasp those limits as the material remainders of what could not be absorbed into or abolished by representations of the past. This is not for the sake of destruction or the enjoyment of taking apart but for deciding what the grounds of politics can be. This capacity itself is more than critical or "destructive." It offers a strategic and situated capacity to orient our political sensibilities.

Romanticism is a period often defined through the destruction of possibility, or as some argue the impossibility, as the grounds for collective life. Lyric poetry—the voice of the "I"—is oftentimes the exemplary genre of such constitutive failure, as it exposes and integrates the I with the other. Or, at the very least, it demonstrates that the "I" is constituted by its repression of or immunity from its other. One could also think here of the Romantic fragment and the remainder as the negativity that enables an exposure or inoperativity without which collectivity and sociability could not occur. Indeed, if Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" or Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" show us anything, it is that the most intense meditations on subjectivity end up grounding it on the ecstatic limits of its fulfillment or recognition. Such examples are at the center of longstanding critical investments in failure. But where the failure of and disruption to the

individual or the subject have been excavated intensely, the Romantic collective that could be traced at its margins has been undertheorized.

The version of Romanticism that seems most interesting for the present is not that one of general failure, but one of strategic remainders. Indeed, it is a more strategic mode of Romantic deconstruction that offers resources for us today, strategic in its treatment of destructions of life from which collective antagonism, rather than subjective failure, emerges. In an attempt to consider Romanticism from this perspective, I did not pursue traditional deconstructions of subjective aporias or epistemological limits that often characterize Romantic literary criticism, the final gesture of which is often to locate a limit to the subject or to the human as such. Instead I have turned to think those aporias and crises as they appear in the positing of collective life, as surplus population, as slave colony, as nation-state, and as species-being. The most useful political resources we derive from such a treatment of Romanticism is not the inspiration of failure in, just to give a popular example, the unfinished project of democratic representation, but a more specific attention to instances of undoing through which antagonism, itself a term of difference or cleavage, emerges as a semi-autonomous destruction. To make a brief return to the example I offered above and the Romantic, what the latter's troubled and troubling representations of life challenge us to countenance is that the riot—along with its evocation of the nonhuman, non-anthropocentric nature of history, which is not the same thing as the figuration of rioters as nonhuman—is the necessary figure by which to think our way out of our contemporary crisis, rather than returning to an affirmation of a past recoverable in some kind of entirety. Such negativity is not to be embraced through a sense that we cannot turn away from it or that it is always-already the repressed return of

the historical, which can tend to foreclose or conclude literary analysis of the political. Rather, it is in a more Benjaminian sense that Romanticism asks us to approach representations of the negation of life, as a figure of limits in which the future of destruction is unknown but in which its past is interned. Such figures can only be understood in their particularity, materiality, and temporality, rather than as homogenous, immaterial, and determinate. These resources for the political necessarily locate reproduction and life at its center, rather than as a peripheral or strictly repressed concern. (Thus it would be some kind of inversion, as noted above, of Arendt's model, where reproductive needs are banished from the political realm. But it would also be an inversion on Agamben's, which identifies bare life with a complete or pure repression within the political.)

Romanticism's frequent grounding or positing of human life *in its own destruction* and at its own limit provides a crucial resource for orienting such a politics. Romanticism magnetizes a paradoxical investment in, even a desire for, figures of destruction. Shelley's "Triumph of Life" is perhaps the best example of this strange desire. But is it also alive in the disfiguring force of needs in Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* and their nonhuman alignment. To consider that such desire might be the source of a politics, rather than the allure of the death drive or of sovereign power or even of pure materiality, is a challenge that Romanticism continues to pose to us today. What Romanticism offers as a resource to the political is, then, this rigorous attention to figures of destruction as they become the material of history. And it proposes an ongoing question to us about what we are going to do with that becoming, and how far we are willing to go with it in taking history apart. To Anna Tsing's treatment of the mushroom

as reminder of that regeneration, the Romanticism with which I am concerned treats the mushroom as the reminder of remainders.

The riot highlights reproduction into a distinctly political mode. Thus it is useful as a figure itself, one in which life is doubled as subject to and source of negation. It puts into an image the chiasmic capacity of life's negativity—its capacity to be reduced to population, to mere life, to the category of the nonhuman—to posit limits to such reductions. The riot figures a capacity of life to be both subject to and source of destruction. This often appears in the light of a spontaneous event. But significance of the riot is not in its evental representation in Alain Badiou's or Jodi Dean's sense. Such representations function to clear away and to constitute a new universal, abolishing responsibility for the particularity of the past in favor of a futural fidelity. They function through the fantasy of complete erasure, where what seems significant to me about the riot or the riotous is the way it makes remainders pulse with the past life of accumulating crises. The riot is a rhetorical disfiguration of life as commodity and in the service of production. It is a negation of that life that skirts the frame of capital's positing of reproduction. And the claim of this project is that our ability to read such disfigurations of life, or reproduction, for their heterogeneous and contested histories is a Romantic capacity.

In its most extreme moments, Romanticism routes politics through nonhuman life to render destruction a heterogeneous and differential affair that we glimpse at its rhetorical edges. This routing of politics through the negation of life, through the disfiguration of human life as limit, provides the central crux of theorizing a nonhuman politics that begins with Romanticism. For instance, we could think Marx's theory of the

tendency of profit to fall as a crisis of living labor; or of Malthus' agricultural scarcity prompted by the excesses of sexual desire; about the related imbalance within the 19th century labor market in which familial reproduction (and thus familial income) was at odds with rising wages; about anticolonial struggles and slave rebellions in the context of necropolitics and even social death; even about the staking of reproductive rights *against* the right to life. All of this to say that what is under question here is an alignment between the political and life that is not grounded in production, or even in *techne* and language's function as a machine, but that concentrates in life a limit, perhaps even a cut, within the generality of reproduction.

Declarations of reproduction's destructive capacities are sounded everywhere today under the title of the Anthropocene and ecological collapse, of imminently impending war (not just of a World War III but an anticipation that continual war will move somewhere new), and even of the end of capital through mappings of surplus value and secular stagnation. It seems impossible to separate politics from destruction today. This is not the same thing, however, as to say that we might not be able to imagine politics without destruction, or even that it should be our starting place. This project has started with an intuition about the impossibility, even the undesirability, of separating politics from destruction, through the rhetorical history of disfiguration and materiality that Romanticism similarly cannot be thought without. It invests in destruction by refusing to let go of the nonhuman, in its historical specificity as a negation of the recognition of human and other life, as reference to a history of negation that gives us the antagonistic traction in which collective forms are produced.

But, as I wrote above, reading the difference in destruction matters. This project focuses on that difference as a demand that Romanticism puts to us today, a demand to understand destruction in its particularity. In this sense, Romanticism and what I called its contemporary mode of negativity above continues to insist that we attend to the disfigurations through which rebellion and sociability are traced today, and where the reproduction—of the state, of capital, of social relations—are at their limits. After all, state violence destroys differently than right-wing parties (or the left for that matter). Wage labor destroys differently than unemployment. Incarceration differently than unemployment. Biopolitics differently than sovereignty. The Human destroys differently than Capital. This list could go on forever. The point here is not to saturate or subsume politics under a homogenous destruction. Rather, these differentiations show us that the particular destruction we decide to stay with, or even turn away from, determines where we will find the chiasmus of crisis, and decide on which uncertainty in which to settle.

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