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Author

Ding, Katherine Ke

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A Blakean Guide to Embodied Knowledge

By

Katherine Ding

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Committee in charge:

Professor Ian Duncan, Chair

Professor Steve Goldsmith

Professor Karen Feldman

Professor Devin Zuber

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Abstract

A Blakean Guide to Embodied Knowledge

By

Katherine Ding

Doctor of Philosophy in English

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Professor Ian Duncan, Chair

What does William Blake mean when he writes, "[a]s the true method of knowledge is experiment the true faculty of knowing is that which experiences"? For Blake, experience is always *bodily* experience, rooted in the interoceptive awareness of "sensing turned inward." My dissertation blends creative non-fiction with critical analysis to explore how Blake prophetically anticipates the discoveries of twenty-first century neuroscientists by insisting that the activities of thinking, feeling, and perception which assemble knowledge occur neither in some disembodied mental sphere, nor in the insular interiority of authentic selfhood. Rather, they are located in the body: in the nerves, the brain, the digestive system, in each "pulsation of the artery." Like many neuroscientists today, Blake reminds his readers to mind the gap between how sensory-perception "intuitively" yet inaccurately appears to our consciousness (as if the world is simply out there when we open our eyes) and the astonishingly complex and intricate mediations by which our nervous systems and brains edit, predict, and construct experience. But Blake also goes beyond the descriptive agendas of most neuroscientists to attribute that gap to our deeply engrained cultural habits of disembodiment. Diagnostically, he observes that modern, Western human beings—immersed in cultural milieux that denigrate and ignore signals arriving from our visceral bodies in favor of ideas attributed to our disembodied minds—have cut ourselves off from interoceptive sensitivity. This schism between body and brain (in which Blake locates his version of "the Fall") is not a mythic event but an ongoing *habitus* that entails catastrophic consequences for our brains, our bodies, and our body politic in ways that psychologists and medical researchers are just beginning to explore.

Blake offers his own poetry, prose, and art as an aesthetic prescription for healing and a corrective curriculum for our poor habits. My dissertation recovers his crucial but long misunderstood concept of immanent genius. Far from it demarcating an exceptional individualism that shakes off all rules (as the word widely connotes now), Blake locates our relationship with genius in cultivating the perceptive keenness of interoceptive awareness, including learning to inhabit states of physiological and emotional discomfort. For the "improvement of sensual enjoyment" that he recommends inverts our habitual relationship to our bodies. Blake is ruthlessly candid: rather empowering our sense of self-possession, naturalized by musculoskeletal portions of the body that respond to our volition, learning to obey genius plunges us into the interoceptive body as the mind learns to feel and follow bodily dictates that are indifferent to our will. Yet, as Blake suggests in his ecological vision of communal being, learning to inhabit this interoceptive body may offer intimate and subtle access not only to our own bodies, but to other bodies and beings, and to the only world that truly exists.

Prologue: cracks in the chamber of consciousness

Knowledge, Friedrich Nietzsche gleefully argues, is an inherently egocentric and deceptive faculty that levitates us out of our bodies. Although invented and possessed solely by “clever animals” (namely, us), every creature would, if it could aspire to this abstracting power, “immediately swell up like a balloon at the slightest puff of this power of knowing.” But as knowledge aspires upward, far from delivering us to unmediated Truth as the philosophers would like to believe, “the intellect shows its greatest strength in dissemination,” which Nietzsche exemplifies through the genteel conventions of “keeping up appearances, living in borrowed finery, wearing masks, the drapery of convention, play-acting for the benefit of oneself and others.” And the greatest bluff enacted by our proud, puffed-up consciousness, is what it hides from our purview:

What do human beings really know of themselves? Are they even capable of perceiving themselves in their entirety just once, stretched out as in an illuminated glass case? Does nature not remain silent about almost everything, even about our bodies, banishing and enclosing us within a proud, illusory consciousness, far away from the twists and turns of the bowels, the rapid flow of the blood stream, and the complicated tremblings of the nerve-fibres? Nature has thrown away the key, and woe betide fateful curiosity should it ever succeed in peering through a crack in the chamber of consciousness, out and down into depths, and thus gain an intimation of the fact that humanity, in the indifference of its ignorance, rests on the pitiless, the greedy, the insatiable, and the murderous—clinging in dreams, as it were, to the back of a tiger.¹

Nietzsche undercuts humanity’s hubris to know thyself by pointing to the stubborn opacity of the living, breathing body that refuses to align with the self-transparent vision of Enlightenment knowledge to offer itself as an illuminated specimen under visual scrutiny. Concealed by skin and tissues, the inner workings that maintain the housekeeping of the body—including digestion (“twists and turns of the bowels”), circulation (“the rapid flow of the blood stream”), and sensation (“the complicated tremblings of the nerve-fibres”), and a few lines earlier, sleep—are hidden from our eyes and do not, for the most part, extend into our conscious awareness. The body also operates largely beneath the threshold of our internal awareness, unless acutely sensitized by pain or illness (an inflamed appendix, for example, that becomes sharply discernable during a bout of appendicitis). The constant activity of our organs and internal organization, Nietzsche observes, are insensible to us except as they become intrusions that impede our sense of self-mastery. Tiger claws suddenly puncture our puffed-up balloon.

It’s hard to argue with Nietzsche on this point: when was the last time you *felt* your appendix when it’s working well, or can even pinpoint its location inside your torso without referencing an anatomy chart? You can go through your entire life without knowing that you have an appendix. But even as Nietzsche uses bodily opacity to exemplify the supposedly absolute limitations of human knowledge (“Nature has thrown away the key”), he makes subtle claims about embodiment and knowledge that are worth examining more closely. For Nietzsche, internal bodily mechanisms are unknowable because they are opaque to consciousness (“does not nature remain silent about almost everything, even our own bodies?”) except in the deranging intensity of pain—and he knew pain intimately through his own chronic and debilitating ailments—which dispels delusion but also shatters the self-mastery that he associates with knowledge. Thus, our opacity (“the indifference of its ignorance”) is salutary, even necessary for our sanity in that Nietzsche insists consciousness cannot become aware of its truly embodied status without dissolving in terror and trauma (“woe betide the fatal curiosity...”). The alarmist tone of Nietzsche’s tiger metaphor further insists that the inner workings of the body that operate largely beneath our volition or notice are not only

inaccessible but also *uninhabitable* for human consciousness. Even as Nietzsche critiques the hubristic legacy of mind-body dualism that Descartes codified into Enlightenment philosophy, he nonetheless extends it by implying that the mind is effectively allergic to the body; to deeply know (“gain an intimation of”) our embodied status and to dispel the transcendent dream of knowledge silently underwritten by our opaqueness is to wake up to the terrifying nightmare of finding ourselves strapped to animal bodies that operate beneath our control or consent, of finding ourselves helplessly astride savage animals that follows their own nature rather than obey our commands. The very extravagance of the tiger metaphor brilliantly performs the aversion Nietzsche recommends; he does not reveal what lies within the crack, but rather proffers a vividly memorable image that simultaneously dramatizes the terrifying response he anticipates and conducts us away from that yawning chasm. For Nietzsche, the unthinkable—which he nonetheless acknowledges is also the material reality that our dualistic dreaming hides from our purview—is the mind that remains intimately in touch with the *involuntary* body, which Western philosophers—and our colloquial usage—associates with an unthinking, inhuman, savagery (“the pitiless, the greedy, the insatiable, and the murderous”). The rest of this chapter braids Blake’s remarkably similar but tonally different descriptions of the inner workings of the body with current neuroscience of interoception to slowly unravel these assumptions and to pose a question that is literally nonsensical within the Cartesian paradigm and still shadows Nietzsche’s critique: *How does one know through the body rather than despite the body?*

For William Blake, the same quotidian processes that mark, for Nietzsche, the internal body as the graveyard of knowledge are instead gateways to the embodied, intimate, and intricate forms of knowledge that Blake calls—in his own peculiar and frequently misunderstood idiom—*genius*. In the illuminated epic *Milton*, he calls on the muses “descending down the Nerves of [his] right arm” to dictate the poem, and he means dictation with a literalness that confounds our expectations of personal autonomy.² Another central, frequently cited passage from the same work mires poetic inspiration in the minutia of embodied experience, located in the spatial-temporal rhythm of blood moving through the arteries:

For in this Period the Poet’s Work is done; and all the great
Events of Time start forth and are conceiv’d in such a Period,
Within a Moment, a Pulsation of the Artery.³

Blake’s productive “Period” is a physiological (if subtle) movement withinside the body, defined by a shifting, responsive internal rhythm. Whereas Nietzsche invokes the “rapid flow of the blood stream” as a deflationary tactic to prick our bloated intellect and to remind us of what we cannot feel or know firsthand, Blake recalls the same bodily experience to claim for it an astonishing, even cosmic significance (“all the great / Events of Time start forth and are conceiv’d in such a Period”). Against a paradigm of genius as a transcendental, disembodied soul or (in secularized terms) radically original self-expression untouched by external influence, Blake’s unabashedly visceral descriptions of genius operating *inside* his body, spirits dictating poetry and guiding—even forcing—his hand can feel bizarre, if not downright insane. “[M]y Style [...] is compell’d by my Genius or Angel to follow where he lead” he apologizes to a patron in a letter accompanying a very different work from his commission, “I could not do otherwise, it was out of my power.”⁴ He also sidesteps the Romantic and post-Romantic obsession with interiority to locate genius in exactly the space that Nietzsche (and many Western philosophers before and after) deem unknowable and uninhabitable: the jostling internal space of the body that, for Blake, consciousness can and must learn to inhabit. At the beginning of his longest work, *Jerusalem*, he further turns our habitual understanding of knowledge and power on its head as he invokes a line from the gospel of Matthew, “to Note the last words of Jesus, Εδοθη μοι πασα εξουσια εν ουρανω και επι γης” [“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,”]⁵ to claim—wildly counterintuitive to any expectation of either self-mastery or

special distinction that might underwrite spiritual authority—“we who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep.”⁶ What is *power* in this strange context, in which a body is made up of and moved by—and knows it!—material processes which occur beneath its consent or control? Why does Blake insist that these remarkably ordinary activities of digestion and sleep—activities that predate the formation of both individual humans in utero and the human species—are exemplarily acts of “Spirits”? How does intimate awareness of these embodied, largely involuntary processes become a form of *knowledge*, rather than—as insisted by Nietzsche and the long philosophical tradition from which he writes—its paralyzing limitation? This chapter begins to broach these questions by approaching them from “withinside” the body:⁷ what would you actually encounter if you peered down the “crack in the chamber of consciousness” to spy upon your own involuntary bodily processes?

In Blake’s version of the crack, perhaps it isn’t what you’d see, but what you’d *hear* that matters. Blake incessantly and radically rewrites the Genesis narrative of the Fall as a catalogue of the sense organs “closd up & dark,” losing sensitivity: “the Ear, a little shell, in small volutions shutting out / True Harmonies.”⁸ However, in his earliest and most extended version of that catalogue—on the last plate of *The Book of Thel*—he describes hyper-sensitive sense organs that seem to predate the Fall into “opakeness,” yet his description (and Thel’s petrified response) suggest that the experience produces the opposite of harmony. In the first three sections, Thel questions the blissfully inhuman inhabitants of her happy vale—a lily, a cloud, a worm, a clod of clay—and discovers that none can satisfactorily address her dissatisfaction with her own mortality. Although she can still “smell the sweetest flowers” and “hear the warbling birds,” she no longer feeds them, and “delights in these no more, because I fade away.”⁹ For Thel, the burdensome awareness of her own transience—a transience that all her interlocutors share but do not find burdensome—removes her from participation in her milieu, her senses no longer infusing her with delight and belonging. Her last interlocuter—appropriately the Clod of Clay—offers Thel a novel experience beyond the sheltered ecology of the vale; she enters a “land unknown,” where the pastoral tone abruptly shifts into lamentation. The poem ends with what she finds there:

She stood in silence, listning to the voices of the ground,
Till to her own grave plot she came, & there she sat down,
And heard this voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit:

“Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
Or the glistning Eye to the poison of a smile?
Why are the Eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn,
Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
Or an Eye of gifts & graces, show’ring fruits and coined gold?
Why a Tongue impress’d with honey from every wind?
Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?
Why a Nostril inhaling terror, trembling, and affright?
Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?
Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?

The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek
Fled back unhindered till she came into the vales of Har.¹⁰

As a direct inversion of the pastoral lushness of her vale that no longer strikes her with delight, here in this murky landscape (“in the land of clouds thro’ valleys dark”), Thel is struck by intense sensations that seemingly arise from nowhere. Although not every sensation is awful in itself (“Eye of gifts & graces [...] Tongue impress’d with honey” don’t sound so bad), embodied experience as

constituted by these exposed senses is terrifying for its unmitigated openness, its vulnerability to anything that impresses upon it, pleasurable and painful alike. Radically porous and permeable, unable to close themselves off or exercise consent, all the senses here seem to mimic the extreme passivity of the ear, that “whirlpool fierce” which “draw[s] creations in” and “cannot [...] be closed to its own destruction.”¹¹ Yet what is the source of that destruction? Blake’s careful and counterintuitive phrasing insists that—rather than some harsh or shrill sound emanating from an external source—it is the ear *itself* that is fierce, its whorl-like physical structure serving to conduct and amplify the material articulation of sound waves. Similarly, the “thousand fighting men” and their arsenal of “arrows ready drawn,” are “stord” in the “Eyelids” themselves; there is no distinction made, no perimeter drawn, between fully functioning sense organs and sensory impressions that arrive through them. The status of this body that “this voice of sorrow” articulates is also oddly suspended between life and death. If the body is the graveyard of knowledge in Nietzsche’s piercing account of what philosophy cannot bear to remember, here the grave speaks—or more precisely, *breathes*—as Thel’s earlier philosophical inquiries into mortality fall silent and she finally sits down at her own gravesite to listen. Yet the body that the voice articulates isn’t that of a corpse, but rather a sensitive, responsive body fully immersed within and aware of (if reactive to) its own materiality—and it is this very awareness, permeating as embodied knowledge, which instigates her terror and flight. As previously promised (“’tis given to thee / to enter and to return”) nothing hinders her escape from this unbearable scene, but what exactly has she fled?¹² And how can she evade anything if the object of her terror resides in the sense organs themselves, in the very body that carries her back to her vale?

The word *vale*, as Blakean scholars have long observed, offers a hint: as a homophone with *veil*, Thel’s flight returns her to the blissful amnesia of a consciousness that can remain abstractly aware of the implications of her own materiality without inhabiting the body that constantly undergoes material change—an amnesia that Nietzsche might remind us is produced *by* consciousness, as valorized by Enlightenment philosophers, rather than dispelled by the illumination of rational self-reflection. In contrast to this abstract knowledge, what the voice breathes up from “the hollow pit” is an experience of inhabiting embodied materiality—being impressed upon by intensified sensations traversing through an intensely vulnerable body—which quickly becomes unbearable even to a curious self who ardently *wants* to know. Why is that state so hard to inhabit, and what might intensified embodiment teach Thel?

The sensory experience that Thel briefly explores and quickly flees—sitting silent and still in the darkness as the body’s own sounds and sensations swarm in—is effectively akin to the experience produced within an anechoic chamber. Originally designed in the mid-twentieth century to test the intricate mechanics of sonic devices, the chamber (etymologically an/echoic = without echoes) is a technological contraption that dampens sound waves inside its closed perimeter. For the human subject, however, the experience of sitting in near complete silence is extremely loud, aptly illustrated by the voice’s opening question: “why cannot the Ear be clos’d to its own destruction?” As the external sources of sounds are muffled within the chamber, we become intensely, forcefully aware of our own, incessant noisiness. As the proprietor of one of the few chambers accessible to the public puts it, “in the anechoic chamber, you become the sound.”¹³ This loud “you” (for whom there are no volume or tuning dials) is comprised of the material, mostly involuntary bodily functions that are typically inaudible to consciousness but are not, as Nietzsche had insisted, beyond its range. Intrepid reporters, record-chasing pioneers, curious explorers, and in 1951, John Cage, who descended into this noisy chasm of absolute silence described hearing the sounds of blood pulsing through the arteries, the digestive system at work, the bellowing lungs, ringing in the ears, and—at least according to Cage—a high hissing that he attributed to the “the nervous system in operation,”¹⁴ though modern interpreters chalk it up to tinnitus. Although the oft-cited claim that no

one has lasted more than 45 minutes in an anechoic chamber is likely exaggerated,¹⁵ many who do enter respond with some variation of Thel's reaction: fleeing the unbearable din to return to the ordinary vale of ambient noise that perpetuates bodily opaqueness, muffling and masking our internal housekeepers who work incessantly without awaiting our instructions. For to hear those bodily housekeepers at work can be more terrifying than hearing nothing: it is to listen to the noise that undercuts the meaning we search for within signs and sensations, courting the nihilism that Shakespeare's Macbeth exemplifies in his last act: "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."¹⁶ And yet the absence of signification—sound that is just sound—is not as uninhabitable as Macbeth's bleak verse might bleakly imply. The experience within the anechoic chamber, like Thel's experience in the dark and silence of her gravesite, is not—not exactly—painful. Although the noise is neither imaginary nor hallucinated, there are no assaults on the senses from without; the intensity that can feel tantamount to an attack is simply the ear discovering novel sensitivity within a new acoustic milieu. Nor are sounds and sensations inside the chamber actually amplified (as the stethoscope does for the ear or the microscope for the eye—the chamber, after all, stifles sound waves rather than enhances them) except by the instrument of the ear itself and the newly honed concentration of consciousness that can no longer track ambient noise. Like the foundational cracks in the chamber of consciousness that has always existed beneath one's notice, the anechoic chamber shows the unwitting self what the ear has always been: an involuntary aperture that not only opens outward onto the world, but also inward onto the involuntary body.

What Thel's experience in the "land unknown" forces her to confront (and this confrontation, I wager, is what makes anechoic chambers both attractive and challenging) is a body that is undeniably a buzzing milieu, perpetually unable to escape the shifting material dynamics that maintain its life and being. This involuntary self—if it can still be called a self—exists beneath subjectivity, beyond the drives of pain and pleasure, indifferent to our consent, and outside the narrow range of everyday consciousness muffled by ambient noise. The anechoic chamber collaborates Blake's description of the "opakeness" that darkens the "doors of perception" by revealing that our habitual consciousness is indeed "veiled" by our habitual distractibility and by the spell of consciousness. What lies beneath our opakeness, still waiting to be inhabited?

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," trans. Ronald Speirs, in *Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 142.

² William Blake, *Milton* plate 2, *E* 96. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman. (University of California UP: Berkeley, 1982). All citations from Blake refers to the Erdman edition, cited as *E*.

³ *Milton* 29, *E* 127.

⁴ Blake's letter to Reverent Trusler, August 16, 1799, *E* 701

⁵ *Jerusalem* 3, *E* 145. The words are gouged from the plate. All further references to this text will be marked as *J*.

⁶ *J* 3, *E* 145.

⁷ I draw the word "withinside" from *Milton* 20, *E* 114. Blake uses the term to describe the opening of the external experienced *inside* the body.

⁸ both quotes are on *J* 45, *E* 198.

⁹ *Book of Thel* 4, *E* 5.

¹⁰ *Book of Thel* 6, *E* 6.

¹¹ *Book of Thel* 6, *E* 6. Branka Arsic's description of Thoreau's obsession with the peculiar passivity of listening applies particularly well to this Blakean passage: "[m]ore than the eye, the ear allows an object to inscribe itself into the perceiver. In the case of listening, then, external materiality—actual sonorous vibration—literally or physically enters the perceiver's interiority. In listening—more obviously than in seeing—the perceiver hosts in himself a sound external to him, which is why listening can inherently subdue the perceiver to the point of turning him into the

perceived, annulling the difference between external and internal." Branka Arsic, *Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2016), 45.

¹² *Book of Thel* 5, E 6.

¹³ Steven Orfield, quoted by Ted Thornhill, "We all crave it, but can you stand the silence?" *The Daily Mail*. April 3, 2012. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2124581/The-worlds-quietest-place-chamber-Orfield-Laboratories.html>

¹⁴ Donald Stein, "A few notes about silence and John Cage" November 24, 2004.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20060212191730/http://www.cbc.ca/sask/features/artist/journal2.html>

¹⁵ The claim comes from Ted Thornhill in *The Daily Mail*, and has been picked up by other news agencies:

[https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2124581/The-worlds-quietest-place-chamber-Orfield-](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2124581/The-worlds-quietest-place-chamber-Orfield-Laboratories.html)

[Laboratories.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2124581/The-worlds-quietest-place-chamber-Orfield-Laboratories.html). Also cited by Caity Weaver, "Can I Survive the 'Quietest Place on Earth'?" *The New York Times Magazine*, November 23, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/23/magazine/quiet-chamber-minneapolis.html>

¹⁶ William Shakespeare. *Macbeth*, ed. Barbara A Mowat (Washington D.C: Folger Shakespeare Library P, 2003), 5.5.27-28.

chapter one: apertures into selfhood

the self is an illusion done with mirrors

For Jacques Lacan, arguably the most influential recent Western philosopher on the vexations of self-mastery, the very chasm that segregates the involuntary body from the *I* “in which the subject recognizes himself”¹ is also “a vital dehiscence constitutive of man” that simultaneously constitutes the human and alienates our species from every other form of being; we’ll return shortly to examine the anthropological implications of this claim. Within each emerging self, this cleavage is not present at birth but occurs at a specific developmental moment that Lacan famously describes as the mirror stage.² The optics of this scene are simple enough:

...the striking spectacle of a nursling in front of a mirror who has not yet mastered walking, or even standing, but who—though held tightly by some prop, human or artificial (what, in France, we call a *trotte-bebe*)—overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the constraints of his prop in order to adopt a slightly leaning-forward position and take in an instantaneous view of the image in order to fix it in his mind.³

In each description of the mirror stage, Lacan belabors the child’s liminal stage of physiological development and imperfect motor control; this moment can only occur as the infant is just beginning to pull himself upright but is not yet able to fully support his own weight or maneuver without aid. From this state of physiological dependency upon other bodies (still “held tightly by some prop, human or artificial”) yet on the cusp of attaining autonomous mobility, the infant experiences triumphant jubilation as he momentarily “overcomes [...] the constraints of his prop” to stare at himself in the mirror. What exactly is he celebrating? A mirage, Lacan explains: “[h]is joy is due to his imaginary triumph in achieving a degree of muscular co-ordination which he has not yet actually achieved.”⁴ Leaning towards his image in the mirror, the child sees “the vision of the whole body-image”—an erect figure, self-contained (like a Blakean outline) “as the contour of his stature”—and joyfully identifies the autonomous outline as himself.⁵ Lacan insists that this recognition is a misrecognition. Identifying with this image of bodily unity creates a “discordance with his own reality,” for the integrity and self-mastery the image promises “appears against a background of organic disturbance and discord,” contrasting with the infant’s visceral experience of his still uncoordinated body, “the ‘body in bits and pieces’ (*corps morcelé*).”⁶ The “vital dehiscence” occurs as the infant’s jubilant identification with his autonomous and self-coordinated image splits off from his discombobulated experience of his own body, inaugurating identity as abstraction out of embodied experience.

The real setting of this scene, of course, is not overtly visible. Lacan reminds his readers that the “transformation [...] takes place *within* the subject.”⁷ (emphasis added). This “subject” emerges against the shifting textures of embodied experience, for the shift takes place within—or more specifically, *makes a place of*—the child’s interiority, or what Blake describes as “the human abstract,” found “nowhere” but “in the human brain.”⁸ This configuration of the self comes into being as it levitates towards nowhere, divesting from its *corps morcelé* to inhabit the imaginary (and newly created) space of interiority in which this *I* can become (via identification) the organic wholeness that it sees and assumes. In this sense, as Jane Gallop provocatively puts it, “the self is an illusion done with mirrors.”⁹ In Lacan’s analysis, the problem with this newly constructed *I* isn’t necessarily that it’s false or illusory, but rather that the illusion is extremely fragile, perpetually threatened by the visceral, intrusive presentness of the “fragmented body” it disavowed but cannot fully banish. The *I*’s very existence is dependent upon shoring up the schism (hence, the “vital dehiscence”) that cordons it from inhabiting its own immanence. Thus, although the infant is jubilant, Lacan knows

better: he spells out the grim ramifications of the mirror scene for both the individual *I* and for the human species whom it joins at this moment:

This illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, entail a constant danger of sliding back again into the chaos from which he started; it hangs over the abyss of a dizzy Assent in which one can perhaps see the very essence of Anxiety.

Nor is this all. It is the gap separating man from nature that determines his lack of relationship to nature, and begets his narcissistic shield, with its nacreous covering on which is painted the world from which he is forever cut off, but this same structure is also the sight where his own milieu is grafted on to him, i.e., the society of his fellow men.

There are two unities at work here, one shattering the other. The “illusion of unity”—the fantasy of full “self-mastery” over the body—is existentially threatened by re-unification with the *corps morcele* from which the *I* fled. Crucially, after the self emerges from the mirror stage, it does not experience its body *as a body*, but rather as a “chaos” or an “abyss,” as the cracks that undermine its sense of organic wholeness and intrude upon its expectation of self-mastery; the body, henceforth, is inevitably the “fragmented body.”¹⁰ This chasm that takes place within each individual as a developmental progression out of infantile enmeshment and dependency also marks an ontological difference that segregates humanity from forming relations with non-humans, “from which he is forever cut off.” Unlike “nature”, whose denizens have little choice but to inhabit the constraints and supports withinside bodies, the human milieu (“the society of [our] fellow men”) constructed through the circulation of these *I*'s is a perpetually disembodied space: even before the internet, interiority was already virtual. Whereas the nacreous layers secreted by oysters to swaddle irritants that enter their shells enable them to tolerate and coexist with intruders, our “nacreous covering” does the exact opposite: ours ward off material intrusions by sublimating them into the identities, ideations, images that populate the interiorities in which we reside and exchange exclusively with each other.

For Lacan, the mirror stage is “a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation.” Jubilantly celebrated in the moment but lamentable in hindsight, it is a threshold that marks our inevitable progression from our infantile, involuntary relationship to our bodies towards the unrealizable fantasy of full mastery and self-possession over the body. What creates the “internal pressure” that drives this abstracting dynamic, Lacan insists, is our species’ “*specific prematurity at birth*”: our unusually extended period of physiological dependency upon our caretakers during which we lack control over our own bodies. Unlike, say, spindly-legged foals who are up and running within hours of birth, or newborn chimps—our closest, non-human relatives—who can readily cling onto their mothers (thus freeing her hands to move and forage), even full-term human newborns cannot support their own heads and much of their movements (startle reflex, erratic limbs, twitchy muscles) are involuntary. Even before the emergence of the “I” and prior to any fateful encounters with mirrors, “the neonatal months,” Lacan insists, are a period of “a primordial discord betrayed by malaise and motor uncoordination.” The temporal claim here is striking: the Lacanian newborn is already existentially unhappy, already (like Blake’s newborn Orc) chafing at his bonds and preemptively frustrated by his lack of self-mastery over his body despite the absence of an image-ideal that would structure that sense of lacking. Similarly, the “prematurity” that amounts to our biological destiny for Lacan is a strange term since its meaning relies upon an antonym that he insists does not properly exist. The self-mastery associated with “maturity” that the infant anticipates isn’t just premature (wait a few months, my son, and you’ll get there) but a mirage that no human (perhaps no body) can ever achieve, and our unhappiness derives from our very anticipation of its reality. As if confirming Winnicott’s observation that psychoanalysis has

“neglected infancy as a state” because “most of the formulations concerning infancy derive from adults in analysis,”¹¹ Lacan struggles to retroactively describe or imagine any form of embodiment that is not already sundered from the *I*, already mourning an impossible ideal—even as the temporal progression of his mirror stage theory insists that such a period of immanence must have existed in every human life, if no longer accessible to adult memory.

Yet there are fleeting moments in his writings when Lacan offers a glimpse of this elusive period that sidesteps the retroactive framing of a rear-view mirror. In an aside to his meandering observations of the mirror scene in “Some Reflections on the Ego,” he briefly describes how the newborn can interact with its milieu despite its “prematurity”:

His lack of sensory and motor-coordination does not prevent the new-born baby from being fascinated by the human face, almost as soon as he opens his eyes to the light of day, nor from showing in the clearest way possible that from all the people around him he singles out his mother.

It is the stability of the standing posture, the prestige of statues, the impressiveness of statues, which set the style for the identification in which the ego finds its starting-point and leave their imprint in it forever.¹²

The caesura between the two paragraphs marks two distinct forms of relationality. In the first paragraph, this newborn is not stewing in some existentialist “malaise” over his lack of bodily control. If he has not yet identified with his image, neither does he inhabit a “fragmented body”—which, as Gallop notes, co-emerges *with* the image-ideal through the mirror stage to retroactively describe how the newly emerged self now characterizes its prior, “infantile” stage. Instead, this newborn inhabits an extended body in which the lack of boundaries does not reflexively necessitate a retreat into a bounded self but rather enables orientation towards others—the human faces that appear and disappear from view and especially his mother’s face, which he recognizes well before he recognizes his own.¹³ The newborn’s fascination with faces is also distinctly different from the spectatorial fascination with his own face in the mirror stage that, for Lacan, constitutes the human psyche.¹⁴ Relationality at this neonatal stage, Lacan implies, is constituted through the proximity of what appears and impresses upon the senses, the stability of this proto-self located in the support systems outside its skin but withinside the infant’s expansive (precisely because it has not yet contracted inside an outline) sense of embodiment.

Relationality in the second paragraph, where it is explicitly named as identification (“sets the style for an identification in which the ego has its starting-point”), works in precisely the opposite fashion to the rhizomatic enmeshment that characterizes infancy as a shifting bundle of relations. Although Lacan does not cite the mirror function, it is silently at work in the cut scene between paragraphs as he shifts from the newborn who searches for relationality through proximity to the almost-toddler whose sole fascination is with his own image. Here, the trajectory of identification is vertical, relationality mediated by the self’s desire for self-sustaining autonomy. The child literally pulls himself up—or thinks he does. This movement upwards (real or imagined, it does not matter) also creates what Blake might call an “inward rush” into solipsism, as the child’s sense of being withdraws from the arms and objects that support his weight (and from the fascinating faces of others that once galvanized his gaze) to assert the sharp lines of demarcation between his body and other bodies, which he now experiences as “constrain[ing]” “props” that cramp his style. As the mirror scene inverts the body-oriented trajectory of newborns and other animals, relationality as “identification” pushes away from bodies (one’s own and those of others), mediated through the images which alone enable communication and exchange.

Lacan is not optimistic about the prognosis for our species. The mirror stage is a one-way passage barreling towards the “alienating” and “rigid structure” of the adult human psyche: once we have internalized our own image, “the *I*’s mental permanence” is unshakeable and the dehiscence

simultaneously “vital” and—as its etymological roots in medical use suggest—a gaping wound that does not heal.¹⁵ (By the time you can read this sentence, it’s already too late.) But if the *I* is indeed the unhappy inmate and ghostly proprietor of our split mind-body apparatus, its permanence and inevitability turns on an assumption that Lacan (like Nietzsche, Blake’s *Thel*, and as we will see, Elaine Scarry) never questions: the body is uninhabitable without the mediating image of the self, the structure of identification through which we simultaneously recognize and ideate ourselves is the only way to constitute a human being. But to insist that there is no body without the image of the body is to deny the materiality of the human body that maintains many relationships withinside itself (including the ones Blake named digestion, circulation, and sleep) without passing through our vaunted process of ideation. Our paradigm of embodiment as filtered through identification becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: what counts, what registers, what we allow ourselves to experience *as* embodied experiences are the experiences mediated through our images. Everything else—the body that pulses beneath our awareness, the inklings and discomforts that foil our sense of self-mastery, the ring of milk that blooms, “indifferent to my doubts”¹⁶—becomes exiled from the sphere of perceptive possibility, pushed down until it passes beneath our notice. We become, to use Blake’s word, *opake*.

Lacan’s mirror scene is both a reading and a revision of a much older text, the classical Greek myth of Narcissus popularized by Ovid. My favorite version of that myth arrives as a surprise ending to Emily Ogden’s essay on rape and being seen:

What is not said about the myth of Narcissus is that just before the story began, he had been raped by one of the gods. Such things are not uncommon, after all. He fled to the lake because he needed to take a look at the face that had not been seen. But as he sat, he saw that there was more in the pool than his own image. Beneath his reflected face--only a mirage, after all, and it didn't interest him for very long--there was a real shadow, cast by his read head. Into the shadow some bright silver fish had swum to take shelter. He watched them, poised, motionless, balanced, secure. Narcissus didn't move, it's true. Not for the reasons that they say. He saw the fish were comfortable there. He wanted them to stay.¹⁷

Ogden deftly reverses both the temporal and spatial trajectory of Lacan’s “vital dehiscence,” (which is also featured in Ovid’s version: “O, would that I would be able to secede / from my own body!” Narcissus laments when he recognizes the object of his desire to be his own reflection)¹⁸. If Lacan’s mirror scene ends with the irreparable tear between mind and body that inaugurates human subjectivity, Ogden’s version begins with the rend to explore how one might inhabit its fragmented aftermath and sidestep pining after an impossible image of wholeness. If Lacan’s version amplifies the virtuality of Ovid’s mirror-like pond (already in Ovid, the pond is eerily pure, devoid of other life forms) into the pristine surface of an actual mirror, Ogden’s undoes the spell by restoring it to a pond once again, a teeming ecosystem swimming beneath and piercing the bright and blinding reflection upon its surface. Her Narcissus still seeks his face, yet the act of gazing at himself does not ensnare him in the abstract realm of identification with images, but rather leads him—not unlike the newborn’s gaze—to notice how the extension of his body (“a real shadow, cast by his read head”) is already enmeshed with other bodies (where “some bright, silver fish had swum to take shelter”). No less than the flower that bears his name and concludes his tale in Ovid’s rendition, Ogden’s Narcissus becomes a part of the pond. Yet this participation does not occur by discarding his body through suicide or starvation but by recognizing what is already *there*, hiding in the plainness of sight beyond the edges of what we consider to be our body. He sees the subtle yet real impact of his bodily presence upon other bodies: his shadow is not the symbolic absence of light or heft, but a newly formed ecological niche readily found by and filled with other forms of life. He heals not by

recovering some lost integrity, but through embracing interpenetration in a form distinctly different from the version that has been forced upon him.

For all its brevity and simplicity, Ogden's Narcissus feels radical to me because her rendition sidesteps the tragic fate awaiting both Lacan's jubilant infant and Ovid's troubled pretty boy by following a path that Lacan briefly mentions before foreclosing it to humans. Narcissus quickly gets bored with his own reflection ("only a mirage, after all") and focuses his gaze on the bodies beneath, observing how they interact with the extension of his own bodily form. In that moment, his mode of seeing is precisely inhuman by Lacan's definition: instead of becoming enthralled with the image as Lacan predicts of all humans past the threshold of toddlerhood, he responds like monkeys (and on this point Lacan slyly implies our primate ancestors are wiser than us) for whom the image of the body in the mirror is uninteresting because bodies do not cohere in their images.¹⁹ How has he acquired this monkey wisdom? Perhaps Ogden's Narcissus already knows—through the sharp, cruel teachings of rape and the terror inhabiting the *corps morcelé*—that *there is no such thing as a sexual relation*. But here, sitting "poised, motionless, balanced, secure" beside the pool, he also knows what Lacan does not: that pulsing beneath subjectivity, bodies constantly relate through interactions too small and subtle to be visible in our heightened moments of fixation or the disembodied consciousness that Lacan calls subjectivity. Searching for a gaze of recognition, Narcissus finds instead the attentiveness to inhabit the body in its native fragmentation, and he is finally satiated.

the body as pain

For a book that has been hailed as "a seminal text in the study of embodiment,"²⁰ accredited with redirecting the "linguistic turn in the social sciences" towards "a turn to the body,"²¹ the body is constantly discussed yet strikingly absent from Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*. This omission is not incidental, but a crucial ramification of how Scarry's account of embodiment frames the relationship between body and mind to assume self-possession as the governing human norm—and consequentially, to define pain as its intolerable perversion and absence. Even as Scarry seeks to correct the Enlightenment legacy of ignoring the body, especially the strident presence of the suffering body that her book foregrounds, her framework reiterates rather than revises the dualism of mind and body that, for Blake, remains the most entrenched and troublesome legacy of Western, modern modes of knowledge.²² My reading of *The Body in Pain* traces Scarry's signature maneuver of crafting agency by detachment from the "bodily state itself" to explore how forms of embodied knowledge become illegible.²³ Since influential thinkers both crystallize and shape their contemporary moment, I also situate Scarry's 1985 monograph in the historical context of shifting medical approaches to pain management to explore some of the real-world ramifications of her philosophical stance through the legacy of the opioid epidemic, which began in the 1990's and continues unabated today. Focusing on Scarry's endorsement of the pain questionnaire—which played a central role in the over-prescription of opioids perpetuated by legions of well-intended doctors and advocates—I argue that many of Scarry's claims about the relationship between pain and embodiment, even as they are clearly intended to spur actions that alleviate pain, inadvertently produce enormous individual and social suffering, amplifying the problem that she sought to remediate through representation.

Scarry presents her book as a record of the story pain tells when it "at last finds a voice" to describe its own phenomenological structure (3). The very expression of pain is an oxymoron that also contains pain's antidote. In her precise formulation, pain is inexpressible: it has "no referential content" outside the sufferer's body and thus "resists objectification in language" (5). This definition of pain as a bodily sensation lacking a corresponding object in the world is so compendious that it

begins to envelop experiences that are not inherently painful. Any “state of consciousness” that lacks objective content, Scarry argues, “begin[s] to approach the neighborhood of physical pain” and “conversely, when physical pain is transformed into an objectified state it (or at least some of its aversiveness) is eliminated” (6). Pain’s remediation entails an exact reversal of its definition: expressing pain, which also diminishes it, enables an act of object creation that Scarry associates first with the imagination (which furnishes an object in the mind’s eye to match the bodily sensation) and the making of material artifacts.

The benevolence of the imagination, in Scarry’s account, is that it enables what she calls “self-objectification”—the mind’s movement away from “bodily sensations” that arise and fall without one’s consent and into its own interiority, crafting experiences that approach “imaginative self-transformation.” (168, 166, 165).²⁴ Self-objectification, in this sense, echoes the identification of Lacan’s nursing with the image of himself in the mirror that contrasts with his discommodated bodily experience. Yet whereas for Lacan, that “vital dehiscence” inaugurates the tragedy of our species by splitting us into an imaginary “I” imprisoned within a fragmented body, for Scarry, “self-objectification” holds the key to agency and power—without exaggeration, to all that is good in life—by offering interiority an escape route out of embodiment. Hence, pleasure “is usually reserved for moments of overt disembodiment or [...] moments when acute bodily sensations are experienced as something other than one’s own body” (166). Conversely, she associates pain with all “physical and emotional events that, emptied of referential content, exist as merely painful inner disturbances” (167). To be confronted with the intractable intimacy of one’s own embodiment—experiencing bodily sensations without escaping into and through the self-extension furnished by the imagination or artifactual making—is tantamount to the unmaking of the world that occurs in torture, which, as Scarry reminds us, is not so much inflicted *upon* the body, but *by* the body upon the self imprisoned in corporeality.²⁵ In this sense, immanence *is* the body in pain.

Perhaps the most extreme example of Scarry’s allergy to embodiment is her description of the quotidian state during which bodily activities are almost entirely involuntary: sleep. Dreaming, she speculates, “sustain[s] the objectifying powers of people during the hours when they are cut off from the natural source of objects, so that they do not during sleep drown in their own corporeal engulfment.” Dreams constitute “the emergency work of the imagination to provide an object—this object, that object, any object—to sustain and to exercise the capacity for self-objectification during the sleep-filled hours of sweet and dangerous bodily absorption.” Nietzsche’s tiger once again. Here, however, the claws do not wait for bodily dysfunction or an acute wound to start digging in; sinking into any involuntary bodily state—even a state as ordinary and necessary as sleep—already triggers panic that necessitates rescue. Why does the sleeping body provoke such anxiety in her account? What exactly is self-objectification (“this object, that object, any object”) rescuing us *from*?

For Scarry, self-extension and self-objectification restore human agency by lifting the self out of the terrifying immersion in corporality (“drown in their own corporeal engulfment”)—the nightmare of being trapped inside a body whose internal processes remain stubbornly oblique, indifferent to the mind’s directives. Sharpening the binary distinction between active mental faculties that furnish an object to correspond with sensation and the passive passions of the body (“the dense matter of the body itself”), Scarry insists that pain “is wholly passive, it is ‘suffered’ rather than willed or directed.” Her unlikely association of the sleeping body with the body inflamed by pain makes sense: although sleep is not inherently painful, and often functions as an anodyne, sleep resembles pain in her account because both deactivate the mental self-extension that makes human existence bearable by furnishing us with agency to modify our circumstances rather than merely suffer them. To counteract this intolerable passivity, Scarry’s account offers a subtle program of self-possession that hones the dualistic split of a disembodied subject that comes to own the object of its body by segregating itself from the very body it possesses. Agency is inherently bound up with abstraction:

we begin to own ourselves insofar as we are able to abstract from bodily experience at will. When we find ourselves in an intolerable bodily state—and for Scarry, bodily states are inherently intolerable—we look away, we imagine something or someone else, we create something new, we move to a different place. Anywhere but *here*, in this present body as it is rather than as I will it to be. Any knowledge or agency cultivated by inhabiting the body in pain is inconceivable from within Scarry's ontology: passivity is the very opposite of both knowledge and power.

But operating beneath our will, mildly irked, or inflamed with pain: isn't that just what bodies do?

Philosophically and ethically anchored in empathetic reading of letters written by Amnesty International on behalf of torture victims seeking relief, one of the central claims in *The Body in Pain* is that to "express another's pain" and "use language to let pain give an accurate account of itself" at once facilitates healing for the sufferer and constitutes an exemplary act of political participation for the advocate. In contrast to the mixed legacy of her philosophical account of pain (which has garnered many criticisms over the last thirty years and has largely been supplanted by less dualistic paradigms emerging from the neurosciences),²⁶ Scarry's socio-political²⁷ remedy for pain relief through collective action remains remarkably influential.²⁸ Even scholars who critique her epistemology frequently praise her work for its ethical determination and for her attentiveness to the social entanglements of pain. Her claim that "the act of verbally expressing pain is a necessary prelude to the collective task diminishment of pain" might serve well as a creed for many activists and scholars in the humanities and social sciences who seek to amplify suffering voices as a crucial step towards the amelioration of their pain (9). At the heart of Scarry's meditations, which are most applicable to her opening scenes of torture, is the assumption that pain is wielded by an external agent who holds all the power, inflicted upon a subject stripped of subjectivity, transformed into pure and passive embodiment. And the way out of that suffering is a reversal of the inherent powerlessness of embodiment by restoring agency and voice through acts of verbal expression and amplification. But does *expressing* pain—which, for Scarry, means a linguistic representation that makes an invisible, embodied experience legible for others—actually lead to its amelioration?

Writing in the early 1980's, Scarry is cautiously optimistic that despite a long history of institutional distrust of "the voice of the patient as an 'unreliable narrator' of bodily events" that ignores self-reports of pain, the "present era of medicine [...] has begun to focus increasing attention on the nature and treatment of pain" (8, 9). Her prime example of this slow sea-change is the invention and increasing use of the McGill Pain Questionnaire. Scarry lauds the questionnaire not only for enabling "patients to generate descriptions more easily" by furnishing a rich vocabulary from which they select words befitting their embodied experience, but also for its epistemological faith, its inventor's "assumption that the human voice, far from being untrustworthy, is capable of accurately exposing even the most resistant aspects of material reality" (8). By translating an unverifiable experience locked within the sufferer's body into the expressive sociability of language (or, in other versions of pain questionnaires commonly in use, into a numerical scale or visual diagram) observable by others, the questionnaire enables sufferers to access pain relief by making their pain legible to others. Scarry values the questionnaire—when its indicators are believed and acted upon by medical practitioners—for concretizing the elusive, subjective experience of pain into a medical reality on par with other objective, measurable indicators.²⁹

Scarry's prediction, circa 1985, that the medical community was starting to pay more attention to patient reports of pain turned out to be prophetic, though this shift ushered in a far more dystopic future than she could have imagined. From the late 1990's through the 2010's, the medical community—motivated by the desire to remedy what Scarry characterizes as the "alarming phenomenon" that "pain is disbelieved and pain medication underprescribed" (7)—largely adopted a

philosophical and practical approach towards pain relief that is closely allied with (though not identical to) Scarry's assumptions of what pain is and how the clinical observer should respond to it.³⁰ In 1996, the influential American Pain Association touted pain as "the fifth vital sign," to be routinely assessed via questionnaires at each medical visit, a position further endorsed by many other medical associations and which, by the 2000's, became standard practice in hospitals and doctors' offices.³¹ Yet pain is radically unlike the other four vital signs. Whereas pulse, respiration, temperature, and blood pressure are measured by instruments which work as effectively on an unconscious body as a conscious one—pain as viewed through the pain questionnaire—is a uniquely "subjective" signifier available only through patient's self-reporting. Its inclusion among the other vital signs transforms pain into a pathology: like rapid breathing, a high fever, or spiking blood pressure, framing pain as a vital sign suggests that it is something alarming that shouldn't exist but does, and thus should be treated and returned to its nonexistent baseline. The questionnaires indeed invited patients to express their pain rather than suffer in silence and incentivized doctors to treat expressions of pain as real by writing prescriptions that diminish it—as Scarry hoped it would. But as the authors of one pivotal study pointed out, pain questionnaires do not merely or neutrally transcribe pain, "the human voice aspir[ing] to become a precise reflection of material reality" as Scarry lauds of the inventor's efforts in crafting the McGill Pain Questionnaire; they also impart subtle expectations of what should be done with pain once it is observed, creating "a culture responsible for the misperception that patients should experience no pain."³²

1996 was also the year in which Purdue Pharma introduced OxyContin, a newly patented opioid that the drug company touted as non-addictive and aggressively marketed to doctors (who are otherwise poorly trained in pain management) to offer as a safe prescription for both acute and chronic pain. The story of OxyContin in the years since has now become a public health cautionary tale: as opioid addiction rates and overdose deaths skyrocketed, the medical community began to radically revise their understanding of pain and pain treatment.³³ This revision not only shifted away from dependence on pain questionnaires and opioids, but—more subtly and significantly—abandoned the dualistic account of pain that characterizes Scarry's paradigm. Pain is not simply an aversive event remedied by its removal from the sphere of experience, but a complex, interconnected, and often useful dynamic that is produced by the brain as an interpretation of bodily states. To naturalize aversive reactions to the aversion of pain (especially when the pain is chronic) can deliver immediate relief while amplifying pain's neurological circuitry, making future episodes of pain more frequent and painful.

If "the person in great pain experiences his own body as the agent of his agony" as Scarry observes, perhaps what can slowly begin to ease that agony isn't escape routes out of embodiment, but, and counterintuitively, turning inward to inhabit the body in pain (47). Pain—not unlike poetry in this sense—does not only obliterate the world or radically alienate the subject in her own, tightly conscripted interiority, as Scarry insists; it can do all of that while also offering its inhabitant an alternative sensibility with which one can begin to access others beneath and beyond the limitations of referential language. The body is not just the torture chamber for the self but can also serve as a site for inhabiting pain—our own and the pain of others—cultivating forms of knowledge and action that are inseparable from each other.

The "dense matter of the body itself" also anchors Scarry's influential claim that pain cannot be shared. Pain's "resistance to language" locks the experience of pain within one's own consciousness (165, 4):

[F]or the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiable present is it that "having pain" may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to "have certainty," while for the other person it is so elusive that "hearing about pain" may

exist as the primary model of what it is “to have doubt.” [...] Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language. [...] Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.

(4)

“At least part of the book’s purchase,” Rachel Ablow observes, “derives from the intuitive appeal of its core claims: most of us are used to thinking of pain as an experience to which the sufferer has transparent access, and to which the interlocuter has none.”³⁴ For Scarry, pain is literally isolating; it transforms its sufferer into an island whose subjectivity can only be accessed (and saved) by building bridges of linguistic expression. But whether or not this claim indeed holds “intuitive appeal” depends upon your understanding and your practices of expression: perhaps the unsharability of pain is intuitive appealing only in cultures and subcultures, academia among them, that largely equate clear expressions with clear and distinct linguistic references.

The opening paragraph to Steve Larocca's essay on *The Body in Pain* performs a powerful critique of Scarry's paradigm of language which underwrites her assumptions about pain: “As I write this, my mother is dying.”³⁵ He goes on to narrate the texture of that experience of watching the suffering of another from an intimate proximity that offers—not a presumption to hold identical feelings (“what I feel clearly isn’t what she feels, it may not even be analogous”)—but rather a “palette of transindividual feeling” that quietly rejects Scarry’s insistence that the pain of another is unsharable except through referential language.³⁶ Pain is only unshareable if we expect signification to function in the narrowly linguistic sense of a shared linguistic reference. Instead, it speaks from one body to another: “it is as if, in my embodiment, there is some attempt at registering what her face, movements, and utterances impart she is feeling.” Like a powerful earthquake that violently disrupts the roads which facilitate our usual modes of travel, pain travels from one body to another through circuits that run beneath language.

Halfway through childbirth—I had delivered my son hours ago, but not yet his twin sister—I jolted awake in the middle of the night as the anesthetics stopped working. The young medical student who answered my call button looked over my IV (still full, dripping) and calmly reassured me that I was not in pain. I wanted to chuck my water bottle at his head, which would have more likely have convinced him to call security. Instead, through clenched teeth, I demanded to see the attending doctor. She arrived a few minutes later, square glasses and a silvery bob, alert despite the hour. She took one look at my face, then picked up the IV and traced its sinuous line with her fingers until she saw where the medication flow was blocked. She restarted the line and promised that I would feel relief within minutes. After my face relaxed and my body unclenched, she quietly left the room.

If my pain was so invisible to him, what forms of knowing made it so obvious to her? Articulating pain in language failed to convince the medical student (whose response aptly illustrates Scarry’s point that “for the other person, [pain] is so elusive that ‘hearing about pain’ may exist as the primary model of what it is ‘to have doubt’” especially when the articulation seems contradicted by other evidence), but I did not need to speak at all to express it to this experienced doctor. She knew to observe my face, my white-knuckled fingers clenching the railing, the greeting that I failed to return. She knew to give these non-verbal expressions more weight in her assessment than either the marking on the IV bag or my non-existent verbal self-report. Her responsiveness also exemplifies the subtle layers of embodied, often involuntary communication that Scarry’s equation of expression with verbal articulation misses. We “speak” to each other all the time even when we

are not speaking—and pain can be eloquently expressive if you know how to listen. It can teach you how to listen.

When Scarry published *The Body in Pain* in 1985, many veterinarian schools in the United States were still instructing their students to ignore evidence of pain in animals.³⁷ Echoing the Cartesian categorization of animals as machines, they assume that animals can't speak our language—the one that counts—so their bodily expressions of pain do not count. It's worth noting the cruel specificity of that instruction: you can't ignore what isn't present in some form, nor would such instructions be necessary. Ignoring pain denies the reality of its presence even as the human body interacting with the animal registers that reality on some level. But the opposite of ignoring pain isn't necessarily to translate an embodied experience into human language, as Scarry and other advocates insists in their self-appointed task to help pain “find a voice” that can “tell a story.” The pain of animals (and of human animals who have “revert[ed] to a state anterior to language” [4]) is not actually invisible or insensible or inexpressible—the observer or auditor often does pick up on it, if hazily, through his aversions— but its expression is made illegible by a framework of legibility that recognizes pain only through its articulation as referentiality, narrowing the range of bodily expressions to its most disembodied forms.

the expressive order of the face

The term face-work was coined in a 1955 essay by the Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman. Goffman draws from anthropological studies of the Chinese concept of *mei*, and the structure of identity he delineates might be taken as an alternative paradigm to a broadly Western genealogy of sincere self-presentation.³⁸ Defined as “an image of the self delineated in terms of approved social attributes,” this sense of the face (and the interactive self that it structures) deftly sidesteps any assertion of a core identity (G, 5). In terms that anticipate Deidre Lynch's refusal to “consider what character is ‘really’ like,” focusing instead on “character's changing conditions of legibility,” Goffman observes that “[w]hat a person or a culture is ‘really’ like” is the “characteristic repertoire of face-saving practices . . . the traffic rules of social interactions” enacted by “each person, subculture, and society” (G, 5). Face-work, “the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face,” crafts individual agency within the existing fabric of social structure, dependent simultaneously on one's ability to perceive, perform, and direct the expectations of the moment and on others' collective willingness to perceive and tactfully (if provisionally) accept one's performance (G, 5). “The person's face,” Goffman notes, “is clearly something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these events are read and interpreted for the appraisals expressed in them” (G, 7). Face-work *fabricates* (in both senses of crafting that uses the social fabric and a simultaneous self-representation/presentation) what might be called a coherent narrative of identity:

By entering a situation in which he is given a face to maintain, a person takes on the responsibility of standing guard over the flow of events as they pass before him. He must ensure that a particular *expressive order* is sustained—an order that regulates the flow of events, large or small, so that anything that appears to be expressed by them will be consistent with his face. (G, 21, emphasis original)

The silent story the face tells is not necessarily verbalized or recounted (or, as Goffman reminds us, even self-consciously observed) as an overt narration, but is rather inseparable from the mediations

that structure both perception and representation. Narrative resides in the cognitive acts of filtering, organizing, and regulating the “expressive order” and the symbolic significance it conveys to both the self and the social audience (G, 19). “One’s face,” Goffman insists, “is a sacred thing, and the expressive order required to sustain it is therefore a ritual one” (G, 19). Here the “sacred[ness]” of the face does not mark its autonomy from the social realm, but rather the affective investment of its constitution within it: the dual identification of the self with (and *as*) a sacred object and with one’s agency in performing the acts that save face (or lose face when that performative virtuosity is conspicuously lacking).

Eliza Haywood's 1725 short story “Fantomina” provides a paradigmatic example of how to possess one’s face and how that possession may be lost. The unnamed protagonist (“a young lady of distinguished birth”) discovers the nuances of donning and concealing one’s “own” face through the four guises she adopts to seduce her fickle lover, beginning with her impersonation as Fantomina, dressing “herself as near as she could in the Fashion of those Women who make sale of their favors.”³⁹ She turns out to be a consummate actress. The narrator directly addresses the reader’s anticipated skepticism at how her lover “should in such near Intimacies continue still deceiv’d” by lauding the unnamed lady’s performative virtuosity:

In answer to these scruples, I can only say, that besides the Alteration which the Change of Dress made in her, she was so admirably skill’d in the Art of feigning, that she had the Power of putting on almost what Face she pleas’d, and knew so exactly how to form her Behaviour to the Character she represented, that all the Comedians at both Playhouses are infinitely short of her Performances. (“F,” 274)

The persuasiveness of her performances is underwritten by her astonishing degree of self-control. Every part of her body seems fully malleable to her dictates: she can weep at will, “vary her very Glances, tune her Voice to Accents the most different imaginable from those in which she spoke,” and “write in a different Hand” (“F,” 274). She possesses a body that is effectively “all face,” able to craft her legibility by controlling precisely how it appears to her audience, “putting on almost what Face she pleas’d.” The extent of the face-work that her anatomical body performs is most evident in her last guise when she acts the part of a “Haughty Awe-inspiring Lady” (“F,” 267) of a comparable social station as her habitual persona; at all times before her audience of one (her lover), Lady “Incognita” wears a veil that securely obscures her visage from view (“F,” 281). But although her anatomical face is visible in her earlier guises, she retains full possession over its legibility in each iteration—to her delight, it does not yet broadcast her identity and her anonymity endows her with agency over how her face signifies. Even though her lover and other observers remark on the “Likeness” between her features and those of the “court beauty” whom she resembles, no one realizes that both are played by the same woman: “A thousand Times has he stood amaz’d at the prodigious ‘Likeness’ between his little mistress and this court beauty; but was still as far from imagining they were the same as he was the first Hour he had accosted her in the Playhouse” (“F,” 267). The brilliance of her performance in both roles is that she understands and puts to work the distinction between “Likeness” as resemblance (in this case, the identity of physical features) and the verisimilitude that animates a performance, enabling it to appear authentic. Shaped by the expectations that govern and constitute social context, rather than merely constrain it, verisimilitude entails crafting the momentary fitness between the self’s comportment and milieu. In this sense, the verisimilitude that confers and controls legibility is akin to face-work, using attentiveness and the subtle inflections of the audience’s attention to weave the gossamer fabric of social expectation into

the perpetually shifting shape of desirability, or one's own face. Hence, we might understand why Fantomina—although unrecognized by her lover through three previous iterations—so fastidiously refuses to allow him a “Sight of [her] Face” in her final guise (“F,” 281). The same facial features that “were not altogether unknown to him, yet he could not recollect when or where he had known them” when he observes them on visages of the prostitute Fantomina or other characters who are fitted for a different social scene, would suddenly signify on the face of the grand lady Incognita—their legibility (and her identity) enabled by seeing her in situ (“F,” 274). Within this pathognomical paradigm of the face, to truly possess one's own face is not to claim authenticity against the mistaken views of others but to regulate one's legibility in the eyes of others. This is the face-work by which one crafts and manages identity from the outside gazing in.

If the face is generated by the legibility produced through a virtuosic performance, it is also undercut by the moments when one is “caught out of face” (G, 18). Goffman uses the phrase to characterize the face-work performed by others in moments “when a person loses control of his expressions during an encounter. . . . Correspondingly, when a person is caught out of face because he had not expected to be thrust into interaction or because strong feelings have disrupted his expressive mask, the others may protectively turn away from him or his activity for a moment, to give him time to assemble himself” (G, 18). The conscious overlooking of “expressions” unintended by the bearer maintains the legibility of his face by filtering which ones are recognized: the strategic nonchalance of the audience frees the social actor, momentarily caught in bodily acts that blight his legibility, threatening to become an “incident” (G, 17). Although Goffman does not belabor this point, his examples—expressions disrupted by strong feelings, a stumble, a rumbling stomach—suggest that incidents arise when the visibility of the uncontrolled body threatens to overwhelm its incorporation into “the flow of expressive events” (G, 21). In these moments, face-work entails the conversion of bodily sounds, sights, and emissions into the coherent narrative of the face, the unruly bodily expressions ordered and controlled as the presentation of an identity. The face as a “sacred object[]” entails yet denies its embodied fragility: its vulnerability to desecration through symbolic wounding as well as the material processes of the body that undergird it and ultimately undermine it. (G, 31). The expressive order of the face is maintained by the bodily agitations it excludes.

In Haywood's “Fantomina,” the titular character's performances of self-possession finally come to a halt when she goes into labor—while attending a ball—and is unable to “conceal the sudden Rack which all at once invaded her” (“F,” 287). The crack in the social order occurs not only in the moments when Fantomina's labor pangs disrupt the ball, but also when her lover catches her “out of face” in the vulnerability of postpartum disarray. When her mother extracts the name of her lover and hauls him (still oblivious to her identity) to her bedside, she “covering herself with her clothes, and ready to die a second time with the inward agitations of her soul, shrieked out, Oh, I am undone!—I cannot live, and bear this shame!” (“F,” 289). Here, the experience of losing face coincides with both the forceful revelation of her identity and her expulsion from society. This violent unmasking strips her of what Goffman might call the “double definition of self”: both the self as the “image” whose “expressive implications” she has worked so hard to control and the self as “a player in a ritual game” (G, 31). For Fantomina, this loss of identity is tantamount to death; although her biological existence continues (relegated to a “monastery in France”), her life as a social actor ends with the loss of agency over her performance (“F,” 291). The story ends as well, but even as it leaves Fantomina stranded in a sterile environment devoid of her guises, it does not invite us to consider the possibility of living without an identity, implicitly asking, perhaps, that we perform *her*

face-work by averting our eyes and imagining the faces that she wore, “full of Variety,” rather than the faceless existence she now leads (“F,” 291).

Although the narrator politely redirects us from Fantomina's faceless body in the moment of giving birth, it is worth paying close attention to observe what happens to the experience of embodiment in the moment of defacement. Fantomina successfully disguises even her pregnancy by “eating little, lacing prodigious strait, and [with] the Advantage of a great Hoop-Petticoat,”—yet labor itself is an involuntary bodily process that breaks the spell cast by her virtuosic self-possession.

It was there she was seiz'd with those Pangs, which none in her Condition are exempt from: — She could not conceal the sudden Rack which all at once invaded her; or had her Tongue been mute, her wildly rolling Eyes, the Distortion of her Features, and the Convulsions which shook her whole Frame, in spite of her, would have reveal'd she labour'd under some terrible Shock of Nature.

Two polarized modes of inhabiting a body, each the inversion of the other, draw the distinction between possessing one's face and losing it. The paradigm of face-work splits a virtuosic body that is, in effect, all face, capable of crafting and recrafting one's legibility, from a visceral embodiment that is overwhelmed, even tortured, by sensations that it cannot control and own because it disrupts both the expressive order and the virtuosic self who controls its expression. Within this paradigm of self-possession, the scene of childbirth effectively becomes one of torture, in which the lady's “severely virtuous” mother refuses to allow her access to a midwife until she yields up the name of her lover. The body that Fantomina instrumentalizes so effectively for her performances becomes the instrument that is now used against her to extract “Truth” through pain (“F,” 289). My point is not that this laboring body that can no longer conceal its identity is somehow authentic whereas Fantomina's roles or even the social persona of the “virtuous, reserved Lady” are inauthentic—that point would only replicate the logic of torture which seeks to strip the subject of self-possession while locating truth in the uncontrolled body (“F,” 267). Rather, as Fantomina refines her acting skills to claim greater sovereignty over her body that allows her to perfect control over her face, she also comes to experience sensations she has not chosen and cannot banish solely as pain and terror—exterior forces that shatter not only the image of the self she maintains, but the very experience of being a self in the only paradigm she knows. The fragmented, discombobulated body returns with a vengeance in the moments when self-possession slips. For the virtuosic body and the body on the rack—or, in this case, the body *as* rack—are split apart and welded together by the sacred imperative of self-possession; Fantomina's earlier self-possession over her body is suddenly inverted into an experience of being possessed as she is “siez'd” and “invaded” by a “terrible Shock of Nature,” experienced as violently extrinsic to her being even as it arises from her own body.

*

In the “faciality” chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari take a hard line against the face.⁴⁰ Refusing to credit our well-socialized impulse (one that Emmanuel Levinas has formalized into an ethics)⁴¹ to naturalize the face as a marker of privileged humanity revealing deep interiority, they instead argue that the face is a semiotic system imposed by a relentless sovereign order; effectively a constrictive social mask that “neutralizes in advance any expressions unamendable to the appropriate signification” (168). Not unlike the face of Erving Goffman's face-work, faciality is only loosely connected to the anatomical feature we colloquially call the face. Instead, for Deleuze and Guattari, the face is both symptomatic and constitutive of an imperializing operation that disciplines the inherent unruliness of bodies; it is the product of “the abstract

machine” that, like King Midas’s deadly golden touch or Blake’s devouring hydra, “performs the facialization of the entire body and all its surroundings and objects, and the landscapification of all worlds and milieus” (181). Just as “the face is only produced when the head ceases to be a part of the body,” facialization extends its field to enact a similar process of abstraction and control on the surrounding environs, transforming our interactions with our milieu into the possessive, proprietary relation that Deleuze and Guattari call “landscapification” (170). Hence, their advice is to rage against the machine: get yourself out. “If humans have a destiny, it is only to escape the face, to dismantle the face and its facializations, to become imperceptible, to become ineluctable [...] Yes the face has a great future, but only if it is destroyed, dismantled. On the way to the asignifying and asubjective” (171). A face is always a front to be torn down.

Deleuze and Guattari’s brief descriptions of how a face can be dismantled focus on the “faciality traits” that mount a rebellion against the “sovereign organization” of the face: “freckles dashing towards the horizon, hair carried off by the wind” (171). Like the involuntary bodily emissions that mar face-work’s expressive order in Goffman’s account, faciality traits are *body* parts (which happen to be located on the front of the head) that employ the fight-and-flight tactics of guerrilla warfare to resist incorporation into the rigid organization of the face. Their prime example is the tic: “what is a tic? It is precisely the continually refought battle between a faciality trait that tries to escape the sovereign organization of the face and the face itself, which clamps down on the trait, takes hold of it again, blocks its line of flight, and reimposes its organization upon it” (188). Yet the capture and defeat of the rebel also suggests that the “great future” of the “dismantled face” remains distant; the “a-” prefix before signifying and subjective does not succeed in negating its root word, but rather marks a restless and incessant struggle against an entrenched order.

But there are moments scattered throughout other writings when Deleuze softens this hard stance to sketch a different type of face that paradoxically survives its own dismantling, a face transfigured rather than destroyed through the flight out of faciality. Reading Rene Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul*, Deleuze observes: “The face must get rid of its individual and social aspects in order to emerge as what it is in reality: the ‘affect-face’...If the face is in reality the ‘affect-face’, it is clear that it has nothing to do with individuality or the social function of a person.”⁴² Since Deleuze (with Guattari) had defined “faciality” as “the social production of a face,” here we have the curious description of a face that eludes its own machinery—which, in fact, he identifies non-ironically as the true nature of the face (“emerg[ing] as what it is in reality”). If Deleuze sounds like Levinas in this moment of lauding a naked countenance that no longer performs social significations, such a face also evades individuality:⁴³ its “truth” is not self-expression (Levinas’s “you are you”), for Deleuze is adamant that affects are not personalized feelings.⁴⁴ Instead, and in stark contrast to Levinas’s strict circumscription of the face to human visages, Deleuze’s affect-face is rooted in corporeality that does not deny kinship with the bodies—and yes, even faces—of animals.

In *Cinema 1*, Deleuze briefly considers this corporeal dimension of the face: “The face is this organ-carrying plate of nerves which has sacrificed most of its global mobility and which gathers or expresses in a free way all kinds of tiny local movements which the rest of the body usually keeps hidden.”⁴⁵ Here, the face—which is no longer produced by the “abstract machine” of faciality—reveals a different relation: rather than severing the body from the face, this face operates like the transparent face of a skeleton watch that exhibits the inner workings of sensation. The “inside” (network of nerves and sensory conduits) becomes sensible to an observer through the density of skin-surface moved and molded by sensations that reveal the neural operations rather than reproducing the illusion of interiority or the constricted range of socially appropriate significations. Revealing the minute corporeal interactions usually hidden from view by the body’s encasing skin, this face (“plate of nerves”) makes the body legible. Deleuze’s description of this corporeal face once again spotlights the “tiny local movements” (we might think of the restless tics, dashing freckles, hair

moved by wind rather than will), yet instead of mounting a doomed guerilla warfare, they remain “in a free way,” seemingly cohabiting with each other through a “gathering” that is expressive rather than repressively subordinates its members into a faciality regime. What kind of “face” are we looking at now?

Perhaps we're looking at one of Francis Bacon's portraits of William Blake.

*

Published a year after *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze's monograph on the contemporary artist Francis Bacon further explores how faces can be dismantled through portraiture—the very medium that has propelled proprietary ambitions and consolidated sovereign power, serving the faciality machine for centuries. It is perhaps no coincidence that Bacon's most recognizable and obsessive subject matter (at least forty-five versions survive) are the “screaming popes” inspired by Diego Velazquez's 1650 *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. But if portraiture is meant to reveal and elevate personal prestige and power, Bacon uses the genre to turn power against the powerful; the opulent golden throne in Velazquez's portrait becomes a gilded cage in Bacon's 1953 rendition. His signature techniques of deforming his subjects' faces through smears, blobs, bleeding lines, and biomorphic distortions transform them into the very embodied heads that faciality erases through its signature abstraction. The face under Bacon's brush, Deleuze writes, “lost its form by being subject to techniques of rubbing and brushing that disorganize it and make a head emerge in its place” (*The Logic of Sensation* 19). Thus,

As a portraitist, Bacon is a painter of heads, not faces, and there is a great difference between the two. For the face is a structured, spatial organization that conceals the head, whereas the head is dependent on the body, even if it is the point of the body, its culmination [...] Bacon thus pursues a very peculiar project as a portrait painter: *to dismantle the face*, to rediscover the head or make it emerge from beneath the face.⁴⁶

For Deleuze, this embodied head that “become[s] visible whenever the head shakes off its face” (53) is specifically an animal-head: “the deformations the body undergoes are also the *animal traits* of the head [...] the head-meat is a becoming-animal of man” (19 emphasis original, 25). What makes these traits “animal” is not physiological resemblance but the shared vulnerable ontology of flesh: its defenselessness against suffering and brutality. To become animal is also to become subject to the fate of faceless animals in a human, facializing world: as meat, as “potential carcasses.”⁴⁷ Hence, for Deleuze, Bacon's identification with the “convulsive pain and vulnerability” of meat posits an ontological equivalence: “every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility” (21).

This common zone is marked by violence—not unlike the Hobbesian state of nature in which human-animal distinctions collapse into savagery under “continual fear, and danger of violence” (82). But crucially, to remake is not to ameliorate or remedy. Remaking reiterates, even amplifies violence; Bacon's artistic goal is to “unlock the valves of feeling and therefore return the onlooker to life more violently” (17).⁴⁸ Hence, his *modus operandi* is eviscerating: even as he desires to capture the “living quality” of his subjects, he does so through a brutality that he deems endemic to “the violence of sensation” itself. For Bacon, violence is synonymous with both the form and content of truth: the immediacy of sensation registering the inescapable cruelty of reality.⁴⁹

Deleuze's reading further emphasizes the quotidian quality of this violence, as part and parcel of embodiment itself: “[i]n the long run, Bacon's Figures aren't wracked bodies at all, but ordinary bodies in ordinary positions of constraint and discomfort” (xxix). Like the body in pain in Scarry's account, whose extensive range includes any form of embodied experience beyond the narrow realm of conscious consent and control, Baconian bodies are (self-) violated even without an agent to administer the blows; these figures exhibit “the violence of a hiccup, of a need to vomit, of also of a hysterical, involuntary smile” (xxix). Defacialized (as Bacon's biographer puts it, stripped of

"the layers of convention and camouflage by which we all live"⁵⁰), the true relationship between the vulnerable animal body, including ours, and its environs (the "materials and forces" that act upon it) emerges, brutal at its core: the body is "deformed," passive, "immobile." "There is, before anything else, a force of inertia that is of flesh itself" (xxix). In Deleuze's description (one that runs true to many moments in Bacon's account of his own work), these Baconian bodies seem to bypass the intricate dynamics of biological life and even chemical interactions to land in the cold realm of physics: bodies, precisely like carcasses, are inert objects perpetually battered and broken into by violent forces external to its own constitution. No wonder so many of Bacon's faceless heads are screaming.

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In January of 1955, Francis Bacon paints perhaps his quietest portraits: a loose series of initially three, then two additional small oil studies of William Blake. Blake has been buried since 1827 (just five miles from Bacon's London studio), but the absence of a live model is no hindrance for Bacon, who customarily draws from photographs. In this case, photographs of a plaster cast of Blake's face that Bacon had seen in the National Art Gallery.

In 1823, the elderly Blake allowed a young phrenologist, James DeVile, to apply layers of plaster to his face. This onerous procedure—which several observers speculate account for Blake's grim expression—involved holding himself still and breathing through two straws in his nose until the plaster set.⁵¹ Centuries later, viewers gazing at the closed eyes and tense musculature of this mask are repeatedly struck by its deathly visage. "The mask of William Blake was actually taken from life," art historian Marcia Pointon clarifies, "but it would be hard to know from looking at it"; indeed, many viewers, even scholars, have mistaken it for a death mask.⁵² Hans Belting offers this stark assessment: "Blake's life mask with its tense smile appears dead."



Study for Portrait I

Study for Portrait II

Study for Portrait III

Study for Portrait IV

Study for Portrait V

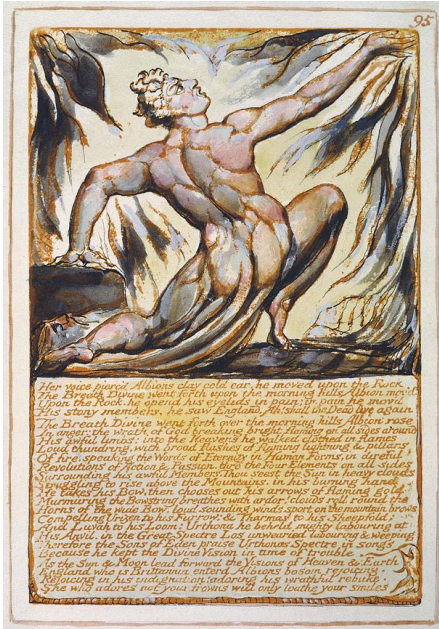
Over a hundred years after his death, in a medium thrice removed—a portrait of a photo of a plaster cast—from the living, breathing head, Blake's face is reanimated by another artist, one who has made defaced figures his calling card. But this brief series, which Belting calls a "special case within Bacon's work," constitute an anomaly; for in contrast to the drastic deformations that characterize most of Bacon's portraits, these renditions of Blake "essentially changed little in the mask."⁵³ Specifically, as Tímea Andrea Lelik puts it, the portraits in this series "are only ones that do not seem to have undergone significant bodily deformations."⁵⁴ The minor modifications in these portraits accumulate to create a curiously enlivening effect. Bacon elongates Blake's head with a light touch that relaxes the *rigor mortis* effect of the plaster mask. Rendered through soft strokes that diffuse edges, the truncation of the neck of the life mask into a pedestal foot is softened in most of the portraits, suggesting a body that perhaps blends into the background rather than one that is violently severed. Set against a monochromatic dark wash, for some viewers, these portraits evince

"an inner self, suffering in absolute isolation," an interpretation that effectively recapitulates a traditional and traditionally Romantic narrative of the insulated, suffering genius, which has long recruited Blake as its poster boy—and after which Bacon carefully curated the image of himself as an "untutored genius."⁵⁵

Yet perhaps Blake's own artwork offer an alternative understanding of the relationship between these figures and their obscure background. If, for Bacon, bodies can touch only through the violence of penetration, Blake reminds us to look more closely and keenly over time. "Tell me, then," a fairy playfully asks the narrator at the beginning of *Europe*, "what is the material world, and is it dead?"⁵⁶ The answer to that question depends upon the "what" that frames it. Materiality itself is indeed "dead" if you view it through the lens of Newtonian physics—impenetrable by definition and thus penetrated only as they are broken into by force and power. But this is precisely the lens that Blake mocks as "single vision," incapable of observing a living truth. Instead, Blake insists bodies are teaming with life inside and out: a body is not the inert mass of a physics equation moved only by the transference of power, but rather always already exist in the delicate, shifting entanglements of biological life. If for Bacon, the "living quality" of his subjects resides in the "violence of sensation," in the nerves that he tears open to reveal them in their bloody glory, for Blake, sensation is not inherently violent and exists only through the *coordination* between bodies that a vivisectional gaze destroys.⁵⁷ Sensation—including the intelligence of pain—is what sustains the homeostasis of all organisms with a nervous system, including the human minds that so readily forgot, or can only tragically lament, that we too inhabit a body: we *are* the body we inhabit. And it is through this biologically material body that other bodies incessant press in, even, especially, when a body has become a corpse. For all that Bacon admires Blake's poetry and his strident "individualism,"⁵⁸ Blake's poems and prophecies repeatedly frame atomistic individualism as despairing and deluded, its self-inflicted paralysis masking a deeper truth that "every thing that lives / Lives not alone, nor for itself."⁵⁹

For Blake, this is an ontological statement rather than a moral one. Against a Baconian vision of bodies as inevitably battered and brutalized by the external environment, Blake offers a collaborative ontology in which external forces facilitate and vitalize shape rather than merely deform it. As Amanda Jo Goldstein has shown, Blake's descriptions of bodies—embryonic, human, animal, or otherwise—emphasize the constitutive work of its environment: "sensorium and sensible world co-figure each other" for "life and shape were drawn from the configurative pressure (damaging or sweet) of the beings and forces that make up an organism's physical, moral, and historical milieu."⁶⁰ The borders between a materially living body and its surroundings are evanescent, especially around the face, that cluster of sensory organs specializing in external perception through which human body is so keenly exposed to the influences of other bodies.

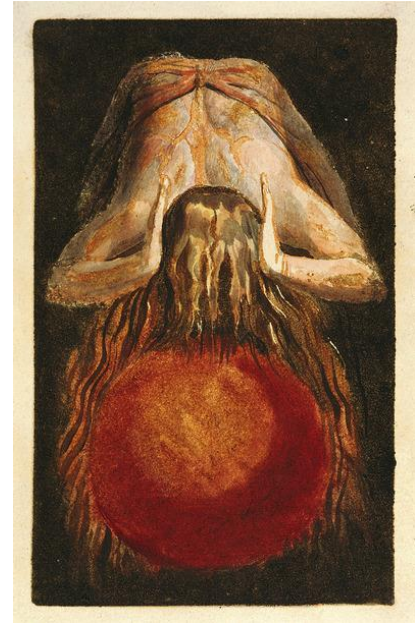
Despite Bacon's professed disdain for Blake's art, his portraits of Blake nonetheless borrow Blakean techniques of drawing the intimate surround *into* the bodies he depicts—a strategic violation of our current conventions of (photo)realism to draw the eye to the subtle bodies that we've been trained to overlook. In several of Bacon's portraits, portions of Blake's invigorated flesh resemble fabric: drifting away from the forehead and chin in *Portrait I*, blowing off the right side of *Portrait V*, or, most noticeably, softly falling in folds from the nose and cheeks in *Portrait IV*. These diaphanous layers that shimmer between skin and fabric, between vital organ and discarded remnants, visually trouble any sharp distinction between the body and the body's surround. These subtle layers would be familiar to admirers of Blake's illuminated manuscripts, whose presumably nude figures (as evident in these examples drawn from his late work *Jerusalem* and his early *First Book of Urizen*) are sometimes curiously adorned by fabric-like folds that float away from and disappear seamlessly into the skin, which itself is a garment woven by intimate social forces.⁶¹



Jerusalem plate 95, copy E



The [First] Book of Urizen plate 25, copy G



The [First] Book of Urizen plate 11, copy A

Bacon applies this Blakean reminder of the material folds that create a material body to the face itself, the most abstractable—and for Deleuze and Levinas in opposite ways, abstract—portion of the body. Focusing on *Portrait II*, one critic describes it as "a flayed face" that proclaims "this is not the outward man [...] this is a portrait not of the flesh but of the spirit."⁶² But if Bacon's brush deemphasizes the familiar outer epidermis, it does so not by "dematerialising the flesh" into transcendental spirit but by highlighting the "plate of nerves," to borrow Deleuze's phrase for the musculature, bone structure, and nerves just underneath the skin. In these unusually tranquil portraits perhaps Bacon touches upon an alternative face, departing alike from both the rigid compositions of faciality and the violent defacements that characterize much of his own work. Bacon fleshes out the rigid outlines of Blake's life mask to produce an immanent face that dismantles faciality and yet is not quite dead meat. For what animates the face isn't self-possessed vitality or the violence that makes vitality visible through transgression, but rather the vital diffusion of matter into a surround with which it quietly, and often obscurely, interacts, which it wears on—even *as*—its own skin. These are Blake's faces not because they accurately represent him—his contemporaries complain of the mask's uncharacteristic grimace, which Bacon's portraits all preserve—nor because they represent the "inspirational type" in line with Deville's phrenological agenda to capture the look of genius, but because they embody, uncannily, the evanescent traffic of sensation and material exchange inside and out that make up an embodied face. Drawing Blake, Bacon finds a serene face in which the spirit can finally rest in the body, from which it has never been separate.

¹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 92.

² Lacan discusses the mirror stage several times in several places. My description (which paraphrases his laborious explanations) stitches together quotations drawn from these sources: "Some Reflections on the Ego", and "The Mirror Stage" in *Écrits*.

³ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (London: Norton, 2006), 75-81, 75-76.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 34 (1953), p. 15

⁵ Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," 15.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 76.

⁸ "The Human Abstract," *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, E 27.

⁹ Jane Gallop, "Lacan's 'Mirror Stage': Where to Begin?" *SubStance*, vol. 11/12, no. 1, issue 37-38 (1983), 118-128.

¹⁰ Gallop emphasizes the strange temporality of the fragmented body that co-emerges with the mirror stage: "the mirror stage would seem to come after 'the body in bits and pieces' and to organize them into a unified image. But actually, the unorganized image only comes after the mirror stage so as to represent what came before. What appears to precede the mirror stage is simply a projection or a reflection. There is nothing on the other side of the mirror" (121). But if there no subject, no project, and no images yet, there is still a body and an awareness inhabiting and animating that body.

¹¹ Winnicott, "The Theory of Parent-Infant Relationship," *The Collected Works of D.W. Winnicott: Volume 6 (1960-1963)*, ed. Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson, 141-158, 143.

¹² Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," 15.

¹³ D. W. Winnicott, "The Mirror-Role of Mother and Child in Childhood Development," *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1971), 1-6. Winnicott's revision of the mirror stage locates the crucial moment when perception constitutes the foundations of identity much earlier, in a dialogue of gazes between the mother and the newborn infant.

What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there. All this is too easily taken for granted. I am asking that this which is naturally 'done well by mothers who are caring for their babies shall not be taken for granted. I can make my point by going straight over to the case of the baby whose mother reflects her own mood or, worse still, the rigidity of her own defences. In such a case what does the baby see? Of course nothing can be said about the single occasions on which a mother could not respond. Many babies, however, do have to have a long experience of not getting back what they are giving. They look and they do not see themselves. There are consequences. Firstly, their own creative capacity begins to atrophy, and in some way or other they look around for other ways of getting something of themselves back from the environment. (1-2).

Whereas for Lacan, the recognition of the self is a misrecognition that fails to grasp the essential illusion of what the mirror fails to illustrate, for Winnicott, the initial recognition occurs a vital dynamic between the maternal gaze that returns the infant's intent to see and the infant who begins to see himself in her face.

¹⁴ To the question of how a newborn who has scarcely opened his eyes can identify his mother "in the clearest way possible," Lacan points to the physiological traces of their shared prenatal body: the newborn contains "certain humoral residues of the maternal organism." ("The Mirror Stage," 78)

¹⁵ Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 76.

¹⁶ Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2015) 95.

¹⁷ Emily Ogden, "How to Step Over a Snake," *On Not Knowing: How to Love and Other Essays* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2022), 37-41, 41.

¹⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin (New York: Norton, 2004), III.607-8, 109.

¹⁹ Lacan writes: [t]he child's attitude is just the reverse of that of animals. The chimpanzee, in particular, is certainly quite capable at the same age of detecting the illusion, for one finds him testing its reality by devious methods which shows an intelligence on the performance level at least equal to, if not better than, that of the child at the same age. But when he has been disappointed several times in trying to get hold of something that is not there, the animal loses all interest in it. It would, of course, be paradoxical to draw the conclusion that the animal is the better adjusted to reality of the two." ("Some Reflections on the Ego," 15)

²⁰ Leila Dawney and Timothy J. Huzar, "Introduction: The Legacies and Limits of *The Body in Pain*," *Body and Society* 25:30, special issue: The Body in Pain: A Re-engagement (2019), 3-21, 3.

²¹ Clifford van Ommen, "The Contemporary making and unmaking of Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*," *Subjectivity*, vol.9 (26 September 2016), 333-342, 334.

²² For a thoughtful account of the dualistic legacy of *The Body in Pain*, see the introduction to 2016 special issue of *The Body and Society*, alongside Steve Larocco's essay, "Pain as a semiosomatic force: the disarticulation and rearticulation of subjectivity." In the introduction, the journal editors Leila Dawney and Timothy Huzar writes: "Scarry's text works with a schema that foregrounds embodiment and embodied experience. However, her insistence on the significance and materiality of the body does little to trouble the distinction between the mind and the body that has done so much to minimise the significance of the body in the intellectual tradition of European

modernity. The body Scarry presents, even though it is made central to her ethical and political discussions, is the body thought from the standpoint of a distinct mind; not a body that might trouble the dualism of mind and body to begin with." (12)

²³ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 168. All further citations are given in-text.

²⁴ For more on "self-objectification," see *The Body in Pain*, 164-180.

²⁵ "The person in great pain experiences his own body as the agent of his agony. The ceaseless, self-announcing signal of the body in pain, at once so empty and undifferentiated and so full of blaring adversity, contains not only the feeling 'my body hurts' but the feeling 'my body hurts me.'" (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 47)

²⁶ See for example, Geoffrey Galt Harpham's point that using the extreme example of torture to describe a universal condition mischaracterizes how most individual experience pain, especially chronic pain whose sources are not easily traced to a single culprit. "Elaine Scarry and the Dream of Pain," *Salmagundi* 130/131 (Spring-Summer 2001), 202-234, 207-8.

²⁸ Rachel Ablow keenly observes, "[i]n the context of pain, Scarry reminds us, we have no choice but to think the subject in relation to the social; we cannot escape the imbrication of the epistemological and the ethical, and we have a unique opportunity to recognize the political implications of even the most personal of our sensations."

²⁹ "But if the only external sign of the felt-experience of pain (for which there is no alteration in the blood count, no shadow on the X ray, no pattern on the CAT scan) is the patient's verbal report (however itself inadequate), then to bypass the voice is to bypass the bodily event, to bypass the patient, to bypass the person in pain. Thus the reality of the patient's X-rayable cancer may be believed-in but the accompanying pain disbelieved and the pain medication underprescribed" (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 6-7).

³⁰ In a speech to the *American Pain Association* that introduces the concept of pain as "the fifth vital sign," the president of the association, James Campbell, declares: we know that patients and the public are underserved with regard to treatment of pain. [...] Today, nurses and physicians routinely assess the vital signs of pulse, blood pressure, core temperature, and respirations in evaluating patients. We should consider pain the fifth vital sign. When a patient says, "My pain is a 9," this is like running a fever or like having a hypotensive crisis or atrial fibrillation. We know how to treat most pain. Someone once said that the greatest advance in pain care would be to implement better what we already know. We know how to take pain at a level of 9 and lower it to 3. Lowering pain from 9 to 3 is not unlike giving Tylenol to lower fever or giving fluids to raise blood pressure. We take vital signs seriously. If pain were assessed with the same zeal as other vital signs are, it would have a much better chance of being treated properly. We need to train doctors and nurses to treat pain as a vital sign." JN Campbell, APS 1995 Presidential Address, *Pain Forum* 5 (1996), 85-88. <https://fbaum.unc.edu/teaching/articles/Campbell1996Pain.pdf>

³¹ For critiques of treating pain as the fifth vital sign, see Natalia E. Morone's and Debra K. Weiner, "Pain as the Fifth Vital Sign: Exposing the Vital Need for Pain Education," *Clinical Therapeutics* 35:11 (November 2013), 1728-1732. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clinthera.2013.10.001>

³² Jerome Adams, Gregory H. Bledsoe, John H. Armstrong, "Are Pain Management Questions in Patient Satisfactory Surveys Driving the Opioid Epidemic?" *American Journal of Public Health* 6:6 (2016), 985-986. [10.2105/AJPH.2016.303228](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303228)

³³ See for example, Art Van Zee, "The Promotion and Marketing of OxyContin: Commercial Triumph, Public Health Tragedy." *American Journal of Public Health*. 2009 February; 99(2): 221-227. [10.2105/AJPH.2007.131714](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2007.131714)

³⁴ Rachel Ablow, "The Social Life of Pain," *Representations* v. 146 (Spring 2019), 1-9, 3.

³⁵ Steve Larocco, "Pain as Semiosomatic Force: The Disarticulation and Rearticulation of Subjectivity." *Subjectivity* vol. 9 (September 2016), 323-362, 323. [10.1057/s41286-016-0009-3](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-016-0009-3)

³⁶ Larocco, "Pain as Semiosomatic Force," 344.

³⁷ Bernard Rollin, *The Unheeded Cry: Animal Consciousness, Animal Pain, and Science*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, xii, 117-118.

³⁸ Erving Goffman, "On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements," *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 5-45. Hereafter abbreviated G and cited parenthetically by page number.

³⁹ Eliza Haywood, "Fantomina: Or, Love in a Maze," in *Secret Histories, Novels, and Poems*, 4 vol. (London: Printed for Dan Browne Jun and S. Chapman, 1725), 3:257, 258. Hereafter abbreviated "F" and cited parenthetically by page number.

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987). All further citations given in-text.

⁴¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "Externality and the Face," *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (London: Kluwer Academic Press, 1991), 187-247.

⁴² Deleuze, *Lectures on Spinoza at Vincennes*, February 2, 1982. Cited by Catherine Malabou, "The Face and the Close-up: Deleuze's Spinozist approach to Descartes," *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), 46.

⁴³ For Levinas, the face transcends both physiological features that reduce it to an object and social context: "the face is signification, and signification without context. I mean that the Other, in the rectitude of his face, is not a character within a context. Ordinary one is a 'character': a professor at the Sorbonne, a Supreme Court justice, son of so-and-so, everything that is in one's passport, the manner of dressing, of presenting oneself. And all signification in the usual sense of the term is relative to such a context: of meaning of something is in relation to another thing. Here, to the contrary, the face is meaning all by itself. You are you." Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburg: Dusquesne U P, 1985), 86.

⁴⁴ On Bacon's affect faces that paradoxically dismantles the faciality, Deleuze writes, "there are no feelings in Bacon: there are nothing but affects, that is, 'sensations' and 'instincts.'" Gilles Deleuze, *Frances Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005), 35.

⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986), 87.

⁴⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*, 19.

⁴⁷ "Well, of course we are meat, we are potential carcasses. If I go into a butcher's shop I always think it's surprising that I wasn't there instead of the animal." Cited from author interviews. *Interviews with David Sylvester* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016), 46.

⁴⁸ Variations of this quote recur—almost as a refrain—throughout Bacon's interviews: "If I go to the National Gallery and I look at one of the great paintings that excite me there, it's not so much that the paintings that excites me as that the painting unlocks all kinds of valves of sensation within me which return me to life more violently" (*Interviews*, 141). Describing the desire for order in art, Bacon suggests that artists strive to return "fact onto the nervous system in a more violent way [...] as instincts change, so there come the renewal of the feeling of how can I remake this thing once again more clearly, more exactly, more violence" (59, 60). Violence is hallmark of fact and clarity, the sure signifier of both truth and artistic achievement.

⁴⁹ "Anything in art seems cruel because reality is cruel" (*Interviews*, 200). Bacon belabors a distinction between the "violence of sensation" that he valorizes and the "violence of war," including the "forms of violence" he has lived through in the wake of two world wars (82). Although many of his commentators (including Deleuze) reiterates his insistence that one has "nothing to do" with the other, the distinction slips in the shared insistence that truth and factuality is signified by violence, the ordering of reality is accessible only through pain.

⁵⁰ Michael Peppiatt writes, "Whether in man of monkey, the scream is the moment of truth, where all pretense and deceit fall away. This goes to the heart of what Bacon strove to achieve: to remove the layers of convention and camouflage by which we all live and reveal the basic, unalterable facts of experience." *France Bacon: Studies for a Portrait*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008), 61.

⁵¹ George Richard, who was a student of Blake's late in his life, observes: "This is not like dear Blake's mouth, such a look of severity was foreign to him--an expression of sweetness and sensibility being habitual: but Blake experienced a good deal of pain when the plaster pulled out a quantity of his hair," cited in *Anne Gilchrist: Her Life and Writings*. (London: H. H. Gilchrist, 1887), 258-60. Also see David Bindman, "J. S. Deville's Life Mask of William Blake," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 3:3 (December 15, 1969), 55.

⁵² Blakean scholar Claire Colebrook for example, refers to the plaster cast as "William Blake's death mask," a slip that becomes crucial to her Deleuzian-inflected argument that "it is matter itself, and not the living form it figures, that seems to endure, opening its own line of survival, extinction, and specification" (149, 157). *Death of the Posthuman: Essays on Extinction, Volume 1* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2014). Also see Ernest Van Alphen, *Frances Bacon and the Loss of Self* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993). He discusses Blake's life mask in the "death" chapter of his monograph on Bacon and observes that "the figure evokes death by its bleak pallor, closed eyes, and black surroundings" (105).

for other critics that view it as a death mask: <http://www.eyemagazine.com/review/article/not-dead-just-sleeping>

⁵³ Hans Belting, *Face and Mask: A Double History*, trans. Thomas S. Hansen and Abby J. Hansen (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2017), 156.

⁵⁴ Timea Andrea Lelik, "Blurred Boundaries: Francis Bacon's Portraits," *World Literature Studies* vol 4, issue 11, (2019), 85.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Jones, "Study for Portrait II--after the Life Mask of William Blake, Frances Bacon (1955)" *The Guardian*. 23 February 2002. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/feb/23/art.williamblake>

⁵⁶ *Europe* iii, E 60.

⁵⁷ For a thoughtful analysis of Blake's critique of vivisection, see Amanda Jo Goldstein's *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2017), 62-68.

⁵⁸ Michael Peppiatt describes Bacon as "a great admirer of Blake's poetry and individualism while detesting his painting" in *Francis Bacon: The Anatomy of an Enigma* (Constable: London, 2008), 164.

⁵⁹ Blake, *The Book of Thel*, 3, E 4.

⁶⁰ Goldstein, *Sweet Science*, 47, 68.

⁶¹ For a verbal example of this fabricated (though by no means falsified) body, see Amanda Jo Goldstein's description of the "soft hands of Antamon" that "covers as it dis-covers, drawing out a bodily fiber in a way that also produces a new garment, a soft 'integument' (membrane) that the Spectre puts on" (*Sweet Science*, 64).

⁶² Jonathan Jones, "Study for Portrait II--after the Life Mask of William Blake, Frances Bacon."

"no poet would ever write an ode to the intestine"

chapter two: the great schism

the superior interior & the inferior interior

In his own time and even nowadays, Blake's unabashed claims to divine inspiration often provoked insinuations of madness—of which he was well aware.¹ Residing in a post-Enlightenment milieu in which claims to divine inspiration had been culturally atavistic for at least a century, Blake nonetheless insists that his works were composed "by immediate dictation [...] without premeditation, and even against my will" such that "I dare not pretend to be any other than the secretary."² He's not humble-bragging: he means dictation *literally*. In a letter consoling his patron William Hayley after he lost his son, Blake confides "I lost a brother & with his spirit I converse daily & hourly in the Spirit [...] I hear his advice & even now write from his Dictate."³ Many of Blake's illuminated manuscripts include invocations to forces outside his self-possession, whom he asks to "dictate swift winged words." Dictation—observing and conveying expressions that he does not claim to own, which he experiences involuntarily and for which he claims a spiritual (yet also material) significance—is key to Blake's sense of inspiration and prophecy. It also poses an epistemological conundrum (and a thorny knot of embarrassment) for many Blakean scholars who want to take his claims seriously while quietly fretting that we're just drinking his Kool-Aid. I recognize that knot in the thickness of my silence after a close friend and colleague confided, "I think Blake was crazy, but you're spinning interesting theories about him."

Blake also struck his contemporaries as crazy because his alarmingly frank descriptions of his mode of knowing—through involuntary, bodily dictation—precisely resembles the mental states that many philosophers and other rationalist thinkers deemed "a disease of the mind, or leads to one and to the madhouse."⁴ In *Anthropology* (compiled from the public lectures he gave from the 1770's-1790's, the same decades during which Blake developed his techniques and composed his early prophetic works), Immanuel Kant issues a stark warning against "eavesdropping" on the "*involuntary* course of one's thoughts and feelings."⁵ He concedes that "to observe the various acts of representative power in myself, *when I summon them*" is a useful philosophical exercise, but to attend to one's inner traffic "when they come into the mind unbidden and on their own [...] constitutes a reversal of the natural order in the faculty of knowledge" and "is the most direct course to illuminism and even terrorism, by way of a confusion in the mind of the supposedly higher inspiration and powers flowing into us, without our help, who knows from where" (emphasis original).⁶

I get what Kant is warning against. I think of my acquaintance who, in a meditative trance before a bonfire, heard the Divine summon him to walk into it and obeyed, losing an arm and leg before startled onlookers could put out the flames. Or the other friend who stopped taking his anti-psychotic medications and started hearing voices issuing secret instructions. Months after he abandoned his job, his home, his community, erasing himself from our lives, I found him walking barefoot along a shoulderless freeway, heedless of the swerving cars. *God told me to draw a protection circle with my feet*, he explained. No amount of cajoling or reasoning could convince him that what compels him might not be the infallible voice of God, but rather "a supposed discovery of what we ourselves have carried into ourselves."⁷ For Kant, the danger of attending to the dictations that you did not summon is that you can readily forget *you* inadvertently generated them, and begin worshipping and obeying as an external, all-powerful entity the idol of your own creation; as Blake

puts it, "thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast."⁸ Powerless to undo that forgetting through either appeals to reason or by tugging at the intimate bonds forged through our long friendship, I finally drove away, leaving him to his mad task of creating outlines powerful enough to prevent the outside from contaminating the inside. I left him the flipflops I was wearing. Eight sizes too small, they disappeared under his feet, briefly giving the illusion that he's levitating above the tarmac.

For Kant, internal experience is ersatz for another reason, one that he deems inherent to the nature of "internal space" rather than specific to madness:⁹

...for the situation with these internal experiences is not as it is with *external* experiences of objects in space, where the objects appear next to each other and *permanently fixed*. Inner sense sees the relations of its determinations only in time, hence in flux, where the stability of observation necessary for experience does not occur.¹⁰

When Kant writes that "inner sense" occurs "only in time," he is also implicitly asserting that it does not occur in space. Operating from a dualistic paradigm that segregates thinking minds from extended matter, he assumes that inner experiences are interiorities, strictly *mental* states that lack physical extension. Kant (like Descartes in this sense) conceives of space as extending outward from the solid mass of the body; space is populated by tangible, presumably permanent objects whose existence can be verified by other subjects. But what is entirely absent within this rigid binary between "inner experiences" that occur in the mind and "external experiences of objects in space" is the vast and shifting, jostling *internal* space of the body itself, where experiences, thoughts, emotions, and feelings are never merely disembodied mental entities, but carry visceral—if often subtle and easily overlooked—physical sensations that mark shifting configurations of our bodies and brains. If, for Kant, the dictations that "come into the mind unbidden and on their own" originate "who knows from where," Blake has a clear answer to Kant's dismissive remark, masquerading as a rhetorical question: they arrive *in* the body-brain, *from* the body-brain, and following these embodied dictations entails paying close attention to one's internal, visceral agitations.¹¹ The butterflies in your stomach before a nerve-wrecking event, the excitement the courses through your body, shivering up your spine and tingling in your fingertips (which is close to how Blake describes the embodied sensation of inspiration: the muses "descending down the Nerves of my right arm").¹² The weight of depression which sits in the belly like a lump, resembling an undigested meal while wreaking havoc with digestion. Heartbreak, which—as one friend marveled while muddling through her first terrible breakup—"I always thought was just a metaphor. I never knew a broken heart could be such an accurate physiological description." Sensations and feelings, especially the strong ones that hold us tightly in their grip, are indeed localizable *in space*. But this is not the external space that we assumed to be readily legible to others—the only "space" that counts within the Cartesian paradigm Kant still invokes—but an internal, embodied space that becomes challenging to inhabit precisely when it is agitated, when our relationship to our own insides can feel overwhelmingly involuntary.

At the beginning of *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud might as well have been talking about Blake when he mocks intimations which bypass conceptual thinking:

the idea of men receiving an intimation of their connection with the world around them through an immediate feeling which is from the outset directed to that purpose sounds so strange and fits in so badly with the fabric of our psychology that one is justified in attempting to discover a psychoanalytic—that is, a genetic explanation of such a feeling.¹³

The very notion of receiving information through an "immediate feeling" contradicts "the fabric of our psychology" because the prime unit of that psychology, the ego, is defined by its sense of

segregation from the external world: “this ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else.”¹⁴ Pathologies occur when “the boundary between the ego and the external world becomes uncertain, or when they are drawn incorrectly.”¹⁵ But one can only maintain these “clear and sharp lines of demarcation” between the ego and the outside world by ignoring or pathologizing the body, which is constantly entangled in intimate, physiological exchange with its milieu even in the most quotidian acts of breathing and digestion.¹⁶

The internal space of the body is what the Freudian ego cannot bear to touch—or does not know how to. Freud insists that on the *inside* (where?) the autonomous unity the ego presumes of itself is deceptive because it “is continued inward, without any sharp delimitation, into an unconscious mental entity.”¹⁷ If the outer edge of the ego is the perimeter (the skin?) where the outline of the self touches the world, the naturalized separation of I from not-I, the subject cleaved from objects, then the inner edge is not an edge, but a murky, unlocalizable dissolution into unconscious, psychic forces. The inside is an interiority, inherently disembodied, the ego, the reality of an abstraction,¹⁸ which Blake aptly described in *Jerusalem* as “in pride of Selfhood unwieldly stretching out into Non Entity.”¹⁹ As Freud—trained as a neurologist during the discipline’s infancy—muddles over the methodological challenge of scientifically studying feelings and “intimations,” he briefly posits the possibility of examining its “physiological signs” before immediately dismissing the endeavor as impossible; thus, “nothing remains but to fall back on the ideational content most readily associated with that feeling.”²⁰ This swerve away from the body’s “physiological signs” towards the mind’s ideational content is at the heart of Freudian psychology: what is experienced in the body is deemed symptomatic of the mental entities and psychic forces, whereas the “real” resides in the disembodied space of the mind, where the talking cure can be administered by making unconscious forces (vaguely associated with the body) available to conscious recognition through language. Optimistically—though Freud had lost that optimism by the time he writes the passages I cited—we come to own ourselves, disciplining our unruly, invisible unconscious through linguistic self-expression: the illusory yet indispensable coherence of *I am*. Arched between the crisp edge of the external world and the blurry “mental entities” occupying its internal unconscious, the ego bypasses the visceral space of the internal body, where we receive the shifting information through our entanglement with the world as embodied sensations rather than concepts or thoughts. Within this ego-centric paradigm, bodily dictations can exist nowhere and say nothing.

But we receive dictations all the time, arising from what researchers now call the body’s interoceptive system, which we will explore in the next section. Such intimations do not necessarily arrive as grand epiphanies but as minute directives prompting embodied acts. *Fall asleep. Find food. Thirsty. Use the bathroom. Need to find a toilet right now!* The exhaustion we ignore to push ourselves onward and upward a little longer. These intimations do not usually arrive as language (though we may announce them to others using apologetic linguistic expressions); rather they take the form of subtle or sharp physiological signals by which the interoceptive system gives *us* dictations rather than docilely obeying our commands. Nor are the directives limited to our own bodies. So much of the intimacy and skill of caretaking is learning to read and respond to some of these embodied signs in another even when they themselves overlook it: the rigid cast of your beloved’s shoulders when you recognize that they are too pissed off to hear what you have to say, the pee-pee dance that every parent knows even when their toddler stridently insists otherwise.

During potty training, a child learns to read his bodily dictations and let his actions be guided by these physiological cues. It’s harder than it sounds for our species. Prior to young children, I lived with dogs and cats and had vaguely imagined that the process would be similar: the cats figure out their litter boxes within minutes and even puppies require only a few days or weeks of kennel crating

to learn to wait until they get outside to do their business. But for many human children it takes years before they can sleep through the night without a diaper, before they learn to let these invisible dictations rouse them from their dreams and guide them to the bathroom. In the meantime, your toddler can scream *no no no I don't need to go* only to pee on your host's pristine white carpet two minutes later. In the decades between our diaper days and when we resort to Depends,[®] we habitually forget that obeying even the most obvious bodily dictations requires cultivation and practice. Learning how to read such signals is a form of knowing so necessary and obvious that we dismiss it as *knowledge*, a term that we reserve for some higher and purer—abstracted—threshold of cognition. Or perhaps this form of knowing requires the opposite of self-mastery: intimations cannot be summoned at will and tend to balk when pressed (just try willing yourself to fall asleep). Self-possession, in this context, is counter-productive: you hold on where you need to let go. *Just relax and try it*, I coax my toddler, before realizing that my hand pressing against the arc of his back is much more effective than my words. As I hear the tinkling in the toilet, one of William Blake's aphorisms comes to mind: *Damn. braces: Bless relaxes.*²¹

*

We do not listen to our bodies, philosopher and physician Drew Leder observes, because the modern, Western paradigm of knowledge has long insisted that the body doesn't have anything useful to tell us.²² If, as philosopher Richard Shusterman writes, "the contrast of mind and body allows for two radically different approaches to the project of self-examination and self-knowledge: one including introspection of our bodily feelings, habits, and comportment; the other essentially confined to our distinctively mental life of thought. With but few exceptions, modern Western philosophy has preferred the more narrowly mentalistic approach, either ignoring or repudiating somatic introspection."²³ Our collective inability to recognize bodily knowledge *as* a form of knowledge in its own right—albeit with a different learning curve from the cognition we prize and cultivate—is part of our dualistic cultural heritage, stretching back through Descartes and Plato, that attributes thinking solely to the mind and dismisses bodily signals as intrusions upon the self-mastery necessary for proper thinking rather than useful information which can and should guide our actions. The story of the body's denigrated status throughout philosophy has been told many times before.²⁴ But even current, revisionist attempts to elevate embodiment by focusing on our *desires* overlook the many bodily intimations—bathroom signals, hunger pangs, and our need for sleep to name the most obvious interoceptive signals—which undercut the desiring subject yet nonetheless viscerally emerge from our bodies. The dualistic culture that we still live in, writes Leder,

fosters a tendency to *overlook* the inner-body's sensory field. Insofar as we attend to something like a body-machine, we do not need to attend to its messages. Again, wisdom and experience are the possession of the mind, while the body is a mechanism devoid of higher consciousness. Thus we are acculturated to overlook interoceptive experience; that is, to look elsewhere, look above, in our hierarchy of value, to messages from the external world or from our own intellect. For the interoceptive field comes to be regarded as what I will term the *inferior interior*. Descartes and other philosophers valorized the rational powers of the mind. Theologians looked to the soul that human beings uniquely possess, with its capacity to worship the Divine, read Scripture, exercise moral judgment. Hence, then, is the *superior interior*, that belonging to "mind" or "soul." This is where rational reflection takes place, meditative prayer, and the deliberative processes now necessary to function well in our complex, bureaucratized, and technologized world.²⁵

And lest we think that we have now entered the age of body positivity, or that we've outgrown the Enlightenment inheritance of a hierarchical split between the transcendent spirit and the gross body, consider how our culture responded when a magic pill to discipline our bodies suddenly showed up on the market. In 2023, a new class of drugs—originally developed for diabetics to control their blood sugar—skyrocketed in popularity for its off-label effect of triggering drastic weight loss. Users on social media raved about its magical ability to "silence food noise"; as one user puts it, "you actually forget to eat."²⁶ Philosopher Kate Mann is troubled as she parses the enthusiastic rhetoric of our collective response. The very concept of "food noise," she points out, only surged on TikTok alongside the popularity of the drug.²⁷ "Coined to name the experience of thinking about food, longing for food, planning our next meal and so on, 'food noise' is a slick rebrand of some of the most basic human drives: hunger, appetite, craving" which are now "being framed as bugs, rather than features."²⁸ The elevation of bodily experience that has transcended hunger suggests that "appetite itself is a problem to be solved" by flatlining one of our most familiar interoceptive signals: we still treat the visceral interior as an inferior space²⁹. We have not moved past Lacan's diagnosis of the human condition if we still desire to rid ourselves of bodily "noise," silencing the homeostatic wisdom of inner sensations to maintain the illusion that we solely inhabit our superior interiors.

But why *do* we feel thrilled that we are no longer feeling the bodily agitation of hunger?

*

Perhaps because the bifurcation of feeling itself—between the emotional states that we identify with and the bodily agitations that undermine our sense of self—is a part of the Romantic legacy we've inherited. If Romanticism famously expanded our superior interior to include the realm of feeling, it also split our experience of feelings between what Philip Fischer calls the shareable and "sociable emotions," newly relocated to our newly excavated interiorities in the early nineteenth century, and the "vehement passions," those visceral and vulgar feelings still relegated to and illegible within the inferior interior.³⁰ The very sense of what it means to be a feeling, expressive self in our contemporary paradigm arises from this split. One might trace one thread of that tangled skein in the topsy-turvy history of the word "enthusiasm." Over the past three hundred years it has transformed from an "eighteenth-century smear-word" into the contemporary character trait that we now feel compelled to display in our career and dating profiles.³¹ In two groundbreaking books on Blake and his cultural milieu, Jon Mee traces the historical course over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by which dangerous "enthusiasm in religious and other spheres" "c[a]me to be increasingly valued as a humanizing and even healing power."³² The excessive, embodied, and contagious feelings that eighteenth-century writers nervously denigrated as enthusiasm constituted "the very anti-self of enlightenment notions of civility" and defined the limits of its sociable doppelgänger.³³ "Self-possession" marks the crucial distinction between expressions of feeling that "provid[ed] a corroborating ground for subjective experience" and expressions of insufficiently self-regulated feelings that remained a "dangerously unstable internal force that threatened the integrity of both the individual and society as a whole."³⁴ For all that poetry became an elevated site of self-expression in the early nineteenth century, Mee warns us that "it was only because literariness itself came to be seen as part of the process of regulation."³⁵ Regulation, in this context, is synonymous with repression of bodily energies that are not readily enfolded into what Erving Goffman might call the expressive order of facework. Excluded from the public sphere and increasingly medicalized as pathological, *bodily* experiences of feeling (especially disruptive, agitating, physiological sensations) and those bodies that refuse to demonstrate adequate self-regulation both became illegible to the body politic. It is this implicitly post-Romantic decree that the feelings expressed in poetry must transcend the visceral body that neurogastroenterologist Michael Gershon naturalizes when he observes, "[n]o poet would ever write an ode to the intestine."³⁶

Although he rarely writes odes, Blake locates poetic feelings on the very visceral spaces that his contemporaries avoided. As Mee points out, he is the lone holdout who continues to embrace enthusiasm under its anarchic sense of contagious bodily feelings rather than refined emotional states. His uncompromising celebration of "Mere Enthusiasm is the All in All!"³⁷ "defiantly kicks away the discourse of regulation that defined most literary attitudes to enthusiasm in the period."³⁸ Yet Mee also worries that Blake's enthusiastic expression of his own bodily energies can only bust down paradigms: it cannot build a world inhabitable by others. Cautioning us against deifying Blake, Mee presents him as a test case "for raising the question of whether the disavowal of the discourse of public reason leads to the death of communication."³⁹ His book concludes with this sobering observation:

Blake's enthusiasm seems to constantly seek an outside to the discourse of regulation, a perspective from Eternity that reveals even space and time to be relative values capable of sudden interruptions and subversions. History in Blake's prophecies is blown apart by his apocalyptic enthusiasm. Against "the homogenous empty time" of the same dull round, Blake offers, like Walter Benjamin's work, the continuing possibility of an unworlding wherein both the individual and the nation are 'blasted out of the continuum of history.' The continuities of identity cherished by Coleridge may have to be abandoned in the interests of regeneration Blake suggests. One might ask whether Blake's disavowal of regulation went so far as to produce an enthusiasm so dangerous as to be incapable of sustaining a conversation? Is his idea of Mental Fight too arduous and extreme to allow any kind of exchange in the public sphere? Is there a price to be paid in terms of comprehensibility and accessibility by Blake's 'mere enthusiasm'? Perhaps the gouged Plate 3 of *Jerusalem* is the sign of someone driven by exclusion to announce a poetics that brooked no response. Yet his constant calls to the public in the poem seem to hope that his "Mental Fight" would arouse some kind of answer. His prophetic books are constantly exhorting his readers to reply. The radicalism of his prophetic books may lie in their refusal to moderate the exchange before it has even began.⁴⁰

What Mee calls "communication"—sustained through fiery or friendly exchanges across the "conversable worlds" that is the topic of his next book—requires practicing the very self-regulation that Blake's unmitigated enthusiasm rejects. For what makes an exchange "conversable" is the modulated rhythm of back-and-forth, give-and-take mental *talk* rather than the arduous passions of Blake's mental *fight*. The paradigm of the conversable worlds offers intersubjectivity through pluralism: the way out of the echo chamber of solipsistic subjectivity is via your recognition of other subjects whose presence you must keep in *mind*. But as scholars have long noted, its tacit requirement of forging identification through common interest or discovering like-mindedness is a double-edged sword. In the eighteenth century (and no less so today), sentimental identification also operates to exclude bodies that do not or poorly perform its ritual of forging polite relatability. In our virtual age in which sorting for likeness is now drastically amplified by algorithms that powerfully curate what appears within our purview, the very practice of polite relatability that glues together conversable communities only serves to indefinitely expend our echo chambers until its outside feels uninhabitable, becoming unimaginable.

If the paradigm of conversable communities that arose in the eighteenth century empowered its participants to co-create and co-curate a "world," that version of world-making has turned dystopic in the internet age as the borders between worlds ossify into intolerance and the complex dance of social relations within any world collapse into myopic sorting for identification. But what comes after the public sphere? If Mee is right that Blake has indeed blasted himself out of his "conversable world"—and he certainly struggled to communicate effectively with many of his

patrons and largely retreated from that world after 1809—perhaps his escape route might point the way to a new paradigm of community, one that both requires and facilitates an alternative way of being. Blake accurately recognized that the cost of conversable communication is immanence itself. Exchange—in this "new commercial society" that emerged around 1700 and "thought of its values as the product of exchange between citizens"—is modeled after the circulation of currency and accrued value as it is legitimized by and flows seamlessly between subjects whose identities are rendered exchangeable through sentimental identification. Haywood's "Fantomina," composed towards the beginning of the eighteenth century, might remind us that to be a self in this form of community founded on currency is to be a signifying face limited by the "dense matter of the body itself."⁴¹ Two decades into the twenty-first century, as most of our monetary exchanges are now conducted virtually, even this cumbersome matter has become dispensable. The techno-wizards are promising that the intimate encumbrance of our unruly bodies will soon follow suit.

Although much has been written on Blake's "mental fight," Blake does not locate community in any mental space—including the proto-virtual space of the public sphere—that Leder might call the superior interior. The immanence that Blake seeks to arouse in his readers is not just the perpetual form of resistance that Blakean scholars often make it out to be, or the last holdout of lonely matter in our increasingly virtual age. Rather, Blake's strident insistence on immanence is a drastic course correction to the upward trajectory of selfhood into our superior interior. For Blake insists—and this is one of his most counter-intuitive claims, especially for Blakean scholars—that community can only be discovered (in its dual sense as found and forged) by inhabiting the visceral body, that very space which eighteenth-century participants of conversable communities feared is inherently unsociable, and that philosophers even today deem to be uninhabitable. By the time Blake writes the epic poems *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, the "mere enthusiasm" he channels and celebrates is no longer synonymous with desire (whose propensities towards ideation Blake observed long before Lacan), but rather localized in the interior inferior in which the "gross" bodily intimations inseparable from bodily necessities emerge to shroud the pristine solitude of interiority.

But why go there? Mee fears that Blake's bodily enthusiasm only serves to alienate him in an imaginative but ultimately solipsistic inner world inaccessible to others. Even Blake's most sympathetic and ardent readers wonder if our attempts to make sense of his works are mostly self-projection, hence the saying that circulates in Blakean circles: reading his works is like attending a picnic in which Blake supplies the words and the reader supplies the meaning. But for Blake, the exact opposite is true: communication is not an exchange of ideas among subjects who have politely "curbed & governd their Passions or have No Passions"⁴²; it is a *bodily* act of communion even when it takes place across the page. One cannot reach others intimately through the exchange of like identities, but rather must go *within*, to inhabit the interoceptive body of nerves and guts and brain that resides "beneath" both our disembodied consciousness *and* beneath the muscular-skeletal body that obeys our will and gratifies our desires. (As we will see, this interoceptive register hidden inside our bodies is where poetry takes place). But if diving into visceral embodiment is indeed an "unworlding" experience—Elaine Scarry's writings on pain might remind us that it can certainly feel that way to the subject—Blake insists that the world we think we inhabit and our very consciousness of this world are much weirder than we realize. Consciousness itself is produced by the hidden workings of the brain and nervous system which in turn are bidirectionally affected by how we inhabit, or fail to inhabit, the homeostatic housekeeping of our own bodies. This is the Blakean paradox that current neuroscience is just beginning to recognize: to access the world beyond the "dull round" of rationalized understanding, to comprehend other bodies beyond the endless projection of our own identities, we must learn to learn to inhabit and heed bodily intimations without conflating them with our desires.⁴³ We do not know what a body can do when we are not telling it what to do.

"perceiv'd by those senses that are clos'd from thought"

When Blake lambastes the "Philosophy of Five Senses" for "closing and restraining" human perception, he is attacking such a deeply entrenched philosophical and cultural assumption that his claims seem nonsensical.⁴⁴ Since Aristotle's *De Anima* (350 BC), everybody—from empirical philosophers such as Locke to Hume to my preschoolers—knows that we possess five and only five senses. To suggest otherwise (as the phrase "sixth sense" and the plot twist of M. Night Shyamalan's movie *The Sixth Sense* connotates) inevitably veers from the empirical into the supernatural. Supernatural powers is indeed how many readers interpret Blake's dogged claim that we have additional senses of which we are mostly unaware.⁴⁵ Yet for Blake, who insists that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul," physiologically grounded sensory apparatus beyond the Aristotelian five senses are commonplace and crucial to daily life, hidden only by our opakeness and our steadfast, commonsensical conviction that they do not exist.⁴⁶

Although Aristotle relies upon five human senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch—as the template for animal senses in *De Anima*, twenty-first century scientists who study how animals interact with their environments have jettisoned the philosopher's anthropocentric paradigm to explore an astonishing array of senses whose organs and functions are radically different from our own. In his book on animal perception, science journalist Ed Yong observes that our "Earth teems with sights and textures, sounds and vibrations, smells and tastes, electric and magnetic fields. But every animal can only tap into a small fraction of reality's fullness. Each is enclosed within its own unique sensory bubble, perceiving but a tiny sliver of an immense world."⁴⁷ The phrase "an immense world," which Yong adopts as the title of his book, is from Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, cited as Yong's epigraph:

How do you know but ev'ry Bird
That cuts the airy way
Is an immense world of delight,
clos'd by your senses five?⁴⁸

Animals do not merely possess duller or sharper versions of human senses, like the bloodhound's impressive nose or the falcon's acute eye that readily lend themselves to our service and to our metaphors. Rather, scientists are affirming what Blake intuited centuries earlier: that our "senses five" and our Aristotelian "Philosophy of Five Senses" have blinded us to the "infinite variety" of ways through which animals perceive their respective worlds, using organs incommensurate with ours. Jakob von Uexill famously compares the animal body to a house with sensory windows to describe how its sensory-perception organs also mask their own limitations: "Each house has a number of windows which open onto a garden: a light window, a sound window, an olfactory window, a taste window, and a great number of tactile windows. Depending on the manner in which it was built, the garden changes as it is seen from the house. By no means does it appear as a section of a larger world. Rather, it is the only world that belongs to the house—its Umwelt."⁴⁹ Over a century earlier, Blake reminds us that how profound the information arriving from each sense is dependent upon the perceiving organ: "[I]f perceptive organs vary: Objects of Perception seem to vary."⁵⁰ For Blake, the philosophy of five senses isn't just misapplied to non-human animals; anthropomorphism has also blinkered our understanding of the variety and subtlety of our human sensory-perception systems, to create what he calls the "confined nature of bodily sensation."⁵¹ Not only do, as Yong writes, "the boundaries of the human Umwelt often make the Umwelten of others opaque to us," our dependence on vision as the archetypical sense have blinded us to the myriad of sensory windows that are much more subtle than the world that appears to our eyes. These windows

are organized and operate in a different manner than vision's clear-cut distinction between the perceiving subject and perceived object.⁵²

The lynchpin concept is *organ*. When Aristotle confidently declares that "there is no sixth sense in addition to the five enumerated," he assumes a one-for-one correspondence between each sense and its clearly circumscribed sense organs: eyes that see, ears that hear, tongue that tastes, nose that smells, skin that touches. For Blake, however, "Man's perceptions are not bounded by the organs of perception. he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover."⁵³ Blake's insistence that sensory perception does not always require a discrete and dedicated organ turns out to be prophetic. Although the philosophy of the five senses still enjoys widespread cultural dominance, neuroscientists point out that Aristotle missed quite a few. Specifically, he overlooked the sensory systems whose "organs" are internal and diffuse (such as the proprioception system, distributed throughout the muscles, tendons, and joints) or do double duty (such as the vestibular system that enables balance, largely located in the inner ear we typically associate solely with hearing). Although there is no consensus yet on precisely how many senses humans possess or what should even count as a distinct sense, the updated tallies always include the five Aristotelian senses that mainly gather information about the external world, the proprioceptive system that enables the body's spatial awareness of itself, as well as our own internal surveillance system: interoception.⁵⁴

Interoception—a portmanteau of internal and reception—is "sensing turned inward," as "sensors inside our bodies [...] send our brains a constant flow of data from within."⁵⁵ "Charged with signaling from the body into the nervous system," the interoceptive system co-evolved with it in complex, multi-system organisms (including humans) to manage homeostasis, the organism's fundamental imperative to maintain itself within the specific physiological thresholds necessary for life.⁵⁶ Because the nervous system senses, signals, and regulates most of our internal states automatically—the pancreas, for example, produces insulin in response to changing blood sugar levels without consulting consciousness—the vast majority of interoceptive signals are unconscious. Or, as Blake presciently puts it, "perciev'd by those senses that are clos'd from thought."⁵⁷ When the brain-body does require our active cooperation, it signals consciousness to act through what neuroscientist and philosopher Antonio Damasio calls "somatic markers" or, more broadly, feelings.⁵⁸ Most of these palpable homeostatic signals are felt in the viscera; this subset of interoception signaling (visceroception) is how you know that your bladder is full and needs emptying or that you've eaten enough and should stop. But whereas Nietzsche assumes that observing the body's viscera at work can only reveal a horror show, current neuroscience research suggests interoceptive feelings constitute pragmatic and indispensable forms of embodied knowledge.

In a marginal note, Charles Darwin reminds himself that when describing the evolution of organisms, "[n]ever use the words higher & lower—use more complicated."⁵⁹ This reminder that evolution does not produce hierarchies is crucial to grasping the full spectrum on which interoceptive feelings function. The homeostatic imperative it serves is by no means base or basic but extends all the way "up" the chain of complexity to play crucial roles in operations that dualistic paradigms of selfhood typically assign to the disembodied soul or mind. Inverting our (post-Romantic) habit of narrowly associating feelings with a human subject's interiority, Damasio grounds feelings in the bidirectional intimacy between mind and body, applied widely to all organisms with a nervous system: "feelings allow creatures to represent in their respective minds the state of their own bodies preoccupied with regulating the internal organ functions required by the necessities of life."⁶⁰ Although Damasio's specific definition of feeling is still contested, researchers working in diverse fields—including affect studies, finance, marketing, economics, psychology, and exercise science—increasingly recognize that even cognitive analysis and decision-making, as well as the sensory-perception that enters through our "senses five," are shaped by both conscious and

unconscious interoceptive signals. "You might think that in everyday life the things you see and hear influence what you feel," warns neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett, who focuses on the neuroscience of emotion, "but it's mostly the other way around; that what you feel alters your sight and hearing. Interoception in the moment is more influential to perception, and how you act, than the outside world is."⁶¹ Turning in its head our commonsensical maxim that decisions should be based on rationality of data analysis rather than unverifiable "vibes" or gut feelings, stock-trader-turned-neuroscientist John Coates observes that "the better judgment of the money-making trader may owe something to his or her ability to produce bodily signals, and equally to listen to them."⁶² Although some of the most compelling interoceptive studies have focused on financial decision-making, which lends itself readily to quantitative analysis, Damasio reminds us that *all* decision-making is rooted in bodily feelings: "When we introspect and search our minds for how we should act, 'we do find 'hunches and tendencies'; hunches and tendencies that are informed by feelings are feelings. Those feelings gently or forcefully guide our thoughts and actions in a certain direction, providing scaffolding for intellectual elaborations and even justifications for our actions."⁶³ Social scientists point to the role of interoception in understanding *other people's* emotions. "When interacting with other people," Annie Murphy Paul writes, "we subtly and unconsciously mimic their facial expressions, gestures, posture, and vocal picture. Then, via the interoceptive awareness of our own bodies' signals, we perceive what the other person is feeling *because we feel it in ourselves*."⁶⁴ The interoceptive revolution that began in the neurosciences at the turn of the twenty-first century and is currently radiating into other fields dethrones "thinking" from its privileged seat—from which, we had wrongly assumed, the mind directs the body while levitating above the influence of bodily processes—by pointing at the complexly embodied feelings that silently undergird and dictate our perceptions and thoughts, often in the form of bodily agitation.

The evolutionary advantage that feelings possess over thoughts and perceptions, Damasio observes, is that they "disturb what might otherwise be an indifferent mental flow." Feelings can "succeed where plain ideas fail" because they do not merely provide information about our internal bodily states; rather, the way they "tug and pull" on consciousness further motivates us to take remedial action, helping "to implement [...] the goals of the homeostatic imperative [...] by making them *matter*" to us.⁶⁵ Feelings are uniquely able to do this because they are "the result of a cooperative partnership between brain and body," a "blending-in" that "interweaves body and brain" in crucial ways that sensory information entering from our exteroceptive organs and proprioception does not.⁶⁶

The everyday contents of our minds, Damasio points out, is often dominated by the images (in his precise usage, "images" are not just visual but pertains to all mental content) that enter from the five "sensory portals," which "sit and wait within the bodily frame."⁶⁷ Although these images "[contribute] importantly to the information generated by the maps of the outside world," Damasio warns against our commonsensical assumption, perpetuated by Lockean empiricism, that everything we know arrives only via these sensory portals.⁶⁸ Blake's description of "[f]ive windows [that] light the cavern'd Man" strikes a similar tone that acknowledges their contribution while refusing to flatten the complexities of perception to the solo operations of the exteroceptive organs.⁶⁹ For although the purview from the five windows may seem spacious, even sublime, his account of their capacity is deflationary: when we "see all things thro' narrow chinks of [our] cavern," our vision is limited by "finite organical perception."⁷⁰ Focusing too narrowly on the organ associated with the specific sense perception (e.g., eyes for sight) misses the astonishing, intricate work of the brain and other body parts that are just as necessary for perception to occur.⁷¹ Counter-intuitively, Damasio and Blake both insist that we cannot really understand how exteroceptive sensory-perception operates without recognizing what Damasio calls the "priority of the world within."⁷² For "we only come to know *that* we know," Damasio observes, "because we are simultaneously informed about

two other aspects of reality," both of which occur fully within and refer to the organism's own bodily processes.⁷³

Damasio suggests that our knowledge of the external world is always silently anchored by our embodied knowledge of "two kinds of worlds inside our organisms" operating simultaneously in different bodily locations and using different physiological mechanisms.⁷⁴ What he calls the "new internal world" aligns broadly with proprioception: it includes our sense of the "bodily frame," "dominated by our bony skeleton and by the muscles attached to it, the skeletal muscles" that enable volitional action.⁷⁵ What Damasio focuses on, however, is the "old internal world," named so "because it contains evolutionary ancient internal organs in charge of metabolism, viscera, such as the heart, lungs, stomach, and guts, large and independent blood vessels, as well as those located in the depths of the skin, endocrine glands, sexual organs, and so forth. This is the universe that gives rise to feelings."⁷⁶ Notice where this "universe" is located: crucially, feelings do not reside in the post-Romantic interiority we associate with our "innermost" or "authentic" self, which we assume should be magically insulated from external influence, but rather "arise in the interior of organisms, in the depths of viscera and fluids where the chemistry responsible for life in all its aspects reigns supreme."⁷⁷ To access feelings skillfully—to really get to know yourself in any materially meaningful sense—you must bypass what you might normally think of as "your heart" and descend lower, into the messy bodily entrails that pre-existed you and often pre-empt your self-command.

In *Milton and Jerusalem*, Blake uses neologisms to index this crucial visceral space where feelings are vitally forged and felt; the state of self-knowledge that he calls "Eternity" is inaccessible except to those who "descend [...] to Bowlahoola & Allamanda."⁷⁸ Although he explicitly defines "Bowlahoola" as "the Stomach in every individual," definitions in Blake's work tend to slip and his descriptions of this bodily region expand beyond the anatomically circumscribed organ.⁷⁹

In Bowlahoola Los's Anvils stand & his Furnaces rage
Thundering the Hammers beat & the Bellows blow loud
Living self moving mourning lamenting & howling incessantly
Bowlahoola thro all its porches feels tho' too fast founded
Its pillars & porticoes to tremble at the force
Of mortal or immortal arm: and softly lilling flutes
Accordant with the horrid labours make sweet melody
The Bellows are the Animal Lungs: the hammers the Animal Heart
The Furnaces the Stomach for Digestion. terrible their fury
Thousands & thousands labor.⁸⁰

The name itself, playfully referencing the "tender bowels," suggests that Bowlahoola's full terrain includes everything in the viscera.⁸¹ It is not an organ neatly circumscribed on or readily identifiable from an anatomical chart; it is instead a felt body region—located in your torso, accessible through and as visceral sensations—but (precisely unlike your arm, governed by the muscular-skeletal system of Damasio's "new internal world") one that is generally unresponsive to the directives of conscious thought. You feel your viscera at work when it gives *you* marching orders rather than the other way around. The feelings that Blake describes in this region lack narrative context and emotive content: something is "moving, mourning, lamenting & howling incessantly" but we have no idea *why* nor does the why matter. What matters instead is the shifting physiological conditions that produce the subtle physiological action of feelings. Drawing (maybe dragging) his readers to inhabit the chemical and mechanical work of digestion he calls Bowlahoola, Blake locates the agency of the actions that occur here in the tiny actors ("thousands and thousands labor") whose concerted effort—which he describes as a literal concert⁸²—enable the homeostatic vitality of a "living self" capable of both physiological motion and emotion ("moving mourning lamenting"). In the old internal world of Bowlahoola, animated by ancient biotechnology that long predated both consciousness and

the nervous system, "force" operates differently from our habitual dualistic divides. The *or* in "mortal or immortal arm" nonchalantly indicates the futility of making such distinctions in this region where animate and inanimate bodies are broken down to become incorporated into another body in the metabolic operations that we share, in one form or another, with all living beings. At their origins in Bowlahoola, feelings do not emerge from nor index an authentic self: instead, the consciousness central to our sense of selfhood emerges as a byproduct of and attendant upon these visceral feelings, which themselves serve our homeostatic imperative.

Blake's uncompromising insistence on the viscosity of feelings was part of what made his writings illegible to his early nineteenth century audience (as well as to many of his twentieth and twenty-first century readers), for whom the emerging paradigm—from which we have yet to emerge—of politely poetic feelings signified transcendence from the animal body. In *Jerusalem*, he decries our "perverted & single vision" for our inability to comprehend how the heart, the lungs, or the stomach can be capable of producing intelligence or spiritual significance.⁸³ When he insists that "he whose Gates are open in those Regions / Can from those Gates view all these wondrous Imagination," Blake again specifies that the "regions" are the visceral organs: "Loins & Seminal Vessels" and "the Stomach & Intestine" and the "heart."⁸⁴ Damasio reminds us that they are also all sites of interoception that belong to the old internal world. What most of them further have in common is that they are linked by the vagus nerve: a "cable composed of thousands of fibers" which "emerges from the brain stem and heads down into the abdomen," visiting en route "the voicebox, then the heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, finally terminating in the gut."⁸⁵ This nerve is a crucial conduit for interoceptive signals: "eighty percent of its fibers carry information back to the brain, mostly from the heart and guts" (which is perhaps why it features so prominently on the cover of A. D. Craig's seminal work that inaugurated interoception studies (figure 1) and appears as one of the few images in Coates' book (figure 3)).⁸⁶ Blake aptly captures this vital relationship between the vagus nerve and the visceral organs it connects in his recurrent pairing of "Bowlahoola & Allamanda."⁸⁷ As Blakean scholars Kay and Roger Easson observe, "Allamanda is the nervous system, Bowlahoola is the system of organs within the body which supports the nervous system"⁸⁸—though neuroscientists might remind us that the relationship is more accurately reversed: the nervous system evolved to serve the increasing complexity of bodies that required coordination between multiple bodily systems.⁸⁹ In humans, the complexity of this multi-organ region traversed by the vagus nerve is such that it has developed its own "second brain": the enteric nervous system that regulates digestion with at least one hundred million neurons.⁹⁰ This nervous system in the viscera, which Damasio speculates "might very well have been the very *first* brain," is "central, rather than peripheral[,] huge in structure and indispensable in form."⁹¹ Coates observes that the enteric nervous system "produces the same neurotransmitters as the brain" and "can act independently" of our central nervous system such "it will continue to function even if all connection to the brain is severed."⁹²

The severance that Coates alludes to involves a scalpel. In 1917, Ulrich Trendelenburg "removed a section of intestine from a guinea pig, severing all connection to the brain."⁹³ He blew into it and was amazed to discover that the "intestinal section could still contract and puff a light gust of air right back [...] like some gentle creature playing a simple game."⁹⁴ Although Blake (whose screeds against dissection we will explore elsewhere) would not have missed the morbidity of a game between a scientist and an organ extracted from the body, the disconnect that he describes is more subtle. He ends the first section of *Jerusalem*—which details the complex fall of the human capacity for feeling and knowing—with a depiction of a cable extending from the viscera, whose form, anatomical location, and function bear a striking resemblance to the vagus nerve:

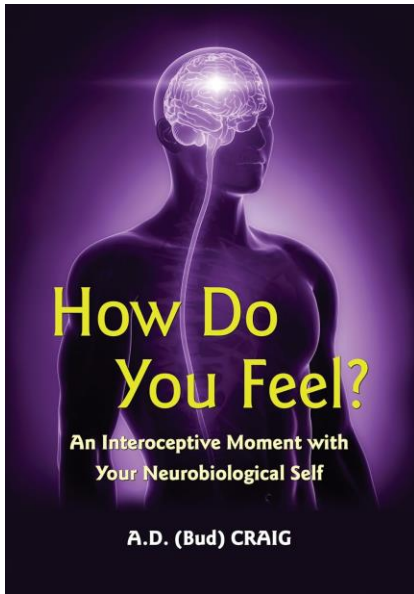


figure 1: cover for A.D Craig's *How do you Feel?*

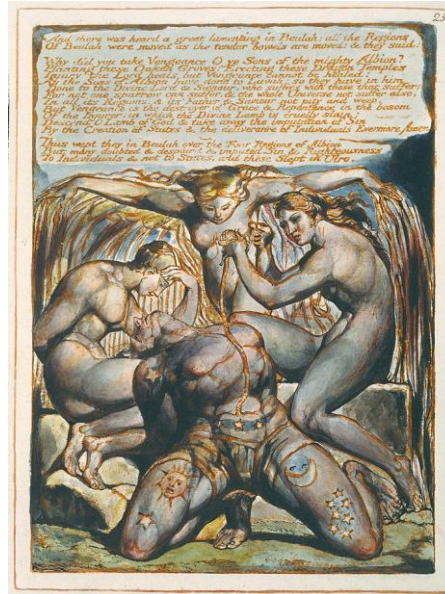


figure 2: Jerusalem plate 25

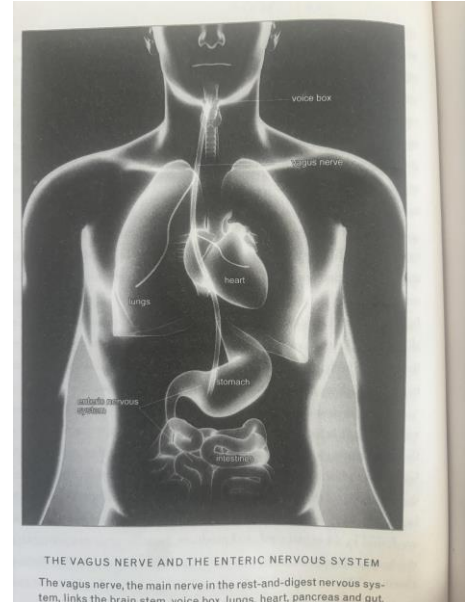


figure 3: illustration in Coates, p. 112

The image on *Jerusalem* plate 25 is often read as a depiction of Albion being disemboweled.⁹⁵ Morton Paley compares it to Nicholas Poussin's "Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus" to suggest a parallel between Albion and Erasmus "martyred by having his entrails drawn out and wound on a winch."⁹⁶ The particularly gruesome torture of disembowelment is that what is normally inside the skin is forced onto the outside, where neither it nor the organism it serves can survive. Yet if an internal body part is grotesquely externalized on this plate, the inversion is more ambiguous and complex than a simple torture scene, in which the very *necessity* of our skin-clad body boundary for maintaining homeostasis is what makes its violation so terrible to endure and to behold. (In this sense, disembowelment reinforces the logic of the outline as essential for constituting a body). But here and everywhere, Blake undermines our visual assumptions of the relationship between the internal body and what meets our external gaze. There is no incision on Albion's body. Instead, the cord (not unlike an umbilical cord) extends out of his navel, its other end gathered into a ball in the hands of the female figure on his left. This image of a cord being wound into a ball, scholars have observed, references a short poem from Blake's notebook, which also appears later in the same poem on plate 77:



figure 4: detail from Jerusalem plate 77

In this poem winding is not an act of torture, but the pedagogical and physiological labor that enables one to follow the physical guidance of the string to its source. Winding also uses skillful resource management to avoid the problem of knots. If we wind the ball Blake suggests as the female figures on *J 25* and *J 77* are doing, the "gate" on *J 25* (which is also a wall of flesh to the eye) is clearly located at Blake's Bowlahoola. But how do we get in? For Blake, whose visions of

redemption are always bound up with retracing the fall, perhaps the question is more usefully phrased as a genealogical inquiry: how did we lose that entrance to begin with?

Perhaps the image on *J* 25 strikes scholars as a scene of torture rather than (as its internal references more aptly suggest) a scene of lamentation and an invitation for visceral exploration because we read it as a depiction of an external affliction, the struggle between internal sovereignty and external obliteration glorified by the high drama of martyrdom. We habitually assume that the body feels pain because that pain has been inflicted upon the body or the psyche by someone else. Perhaps the purest distillation of the grammatical subject-object binary is this: *you hurt me*. Yet when Blake suggests that the fall occurs "Knot by / Knot, Day by Day, Night by Night," he points to the slow and cumulative sedimentation of everyday interactions in shaping our experience.⁹⁷ If this cord is in a sense Blake's Allamanda, the vagus nerve that coordinates and relays signals from Bowlahoola, perhaps our very habit of externalizing the cause of sensation to an agent outside of our body is a part of the fall that he depicts here. For pain, the neuroscientists all agree, *is entirely interoceptive*.⁹⁸ Counter-intuitively (especially to most people in pain), pain does not actually reside in the body part that hurts (which is why one can feel very real pain in an amputated limb) nor is its cause external to the organism that feels it; rather, pain is produced by the brain as a part of its surveillance and depiction of its own internal state, a process that sometimes usefully indexes or anticipates tissue damage and sometimes does not (especially in the case of chronic pain).⁹⁹ For Blake, the fall occurs (at least partially) through our habitual misattribution of our internal bodily states to an external agent. In Bowlahoola, where feelings are forged, the fall happens each time in each person when the visceral sensations and signals relayed by the old internal world are instead experienced by the conscious mind as an external bondage to be transcended, interpreted as something foreign to the body that hampers its volition rather than enables its homeostatic vitality.¹⁰⁰ In a culture (ours) that has long privileged the "superior interior" as the sole source of knowledge, Leder observes that "messages arising from our bodily interior take on secondary status." Not only do we "lack the practices and training to help us notice and utilize signals from within [...] we often energetically *override* them."¹⁰¹ One of the special features of feelings—especially homeostatic feelings arising from the viscera—Damasio reminds us, is that they not only "inform each mind [...] of the state of life within the organism," but they also motivate specific remedial actions; in this sense, at crucial moments, the last leg of the signaling conducted by the interoceptive system requires our active attention and conscious cooperation. But the Western, modern subject—who is only legible to himself and others when he displays self-possession as a demonstration of mastery over his own body—is in no mood to receive the signals arising from the body as dictations to be followed.

Perhaps this is why the cord that emerges from Albion's navel—if it is indeed the vagus nerve—has wandered far off-course from its usual itinerary through the organs in the viscera to carry bodily signals back to the brain. The severance between the brain and the guts that Blake diagnoses was not done with a scalpel, leaving a wound or scar easily recognizable to the eye that can readily distinguish victim from perpetrator. Rather—even as the anatomical pathway of *our* vagus nerve (unlike that of Trendelenburg's guinea pig) remains intact to the eye viewing it under dissection—the disconnection is wrought by cultural binds that "knot by / knot, day by day, night by night" train the mind that what it means to *be a mind or a self* is to ignore or deprecate the signals arriving from the visceral body and the second brain. For Blake, the root of all suffering is not, as Genesis insists, indulging in our desires but rather bodily opakeness. *Jerusalem* narrates the fall as the mind's obliviousness and aversion to bodily signals that is both are and further exacerbate its own dualistic self-severance from the body. Rather than producing an obviously lifeless body within minutes or hours, the devastating effect of this subtle severance accumulates more slowly and

systemically, as disease and dysregulation throughout the body and nervous system in which the mind has cut itself off from the dictation and wisdom of its own "second brain."

If we can recognize that "severance" is not externally inflicted through torture but inadvertently self-exacerbated through enculturated habits of disembodiment, the image on *Jerusalem* 25 begins to read differently, as more closely aligned to both the visual details and the tone of the words that appear on the same page. The figure holding the ball is crying, part of the "great lamenting in Beulah: all the regions of Beulah are moved as the tender bowels are moved."¹⁰² Enjoining Albion's descendants to turn away from "Vengeance" which "cannot be healed," the laments instead recall the compassionate response that Blake attributes to Christ, who "suffers with those that suffer."¹⁰³ Yet the next line insists that the impetus for compassion is not based on an ethical command or commandment of how one is supposed to behave, but rather rooted in *recognizing* the ontological relationships that subtly yet materially connect creatures which our fallen sight presents as segregated from one another: "For not one sparrow can suffer, & not the whole Universe not suffer also."¹⁰⁴ Crucially, the radical empathy by which the visceral experience of one creature intimately moves, "as the tender bowels are moved," the visceral experience of all other creatures does not occur through sentimental identification (for Blake, all identification is sentimental self-projection), but through the sheer physiological sensitivity and sensation felt and forged in Bowlahoola, relayed through Allamanda.¹⁰⁵ Visceral feeling, Blake suggests, is where and how the human organism connects most intimately with the material, external world, especially with its omnipresent suffering.

Emerging insights from twenty-first century neuroscience exploring the physiological mechanisms of interoception might begin to show us how Blake's radical claim is not some vague sense of identification with everyone and everything, but rather an uncannily vivid and accurate description of the strange (and non-envisionable) geometry by which conscious experience occurs in the curious material assemblage of our human bodies. The paradox of visceral feelings is that "*everything we feel corresponds to states of the interior*" yet such feelings may also offer the most physiologically intimate access to the external world.¹⁰⁶ The definition of feeling that Damasio offers is rigorously interoceptive: "we can perceive the landscape and the furniture," but "what we 'really' feel, in the proper sense of the term, is how either parts or the whole of our own organism is faring, moment by moment."¹⁰⁷ He repeatedly belabors the phenomenological and physiological differences between the exteroceptive senses and the interoceptive origins of feeling. Whereas a "perceptual distance separates me from those entities [...] I see or hear or touch," feelings are "*interactive perceptions*" which "gather their signals 'inside the organism' rather than simply around the organism," such that "[b]ody and nervous system remain interactive partners rather than separate 'model' and 'depiction'."¹⁰⁸ Damasio points at two physiological peculiarities of the interoceptive system that uniquely allow "*signals from the body to interact with neural signals directly*" such that "feelings are commingled with the things and events we feel."¹⁰⁹ Whereas the "telesenses" of hearing and sight require complex and layered mechanisms to translate incoming sound waves or light into the electric signals that actually enter the "black box" of the brain,

Feelings owe their existence to the fact that the nervous system has direct contact with our insides and vice versa. The nervous system literally "touches" the organism's interior, everywhere in that interior, *and* it is "touched" in return. The nakedness of the interior relative to the nervous system and the direct access the nervous system enjoys relative to the interior is part of the uniqueness of interoception.¹¹⁰

But if interoception is how an organism "touches" itself with a physiological intimacy unmatched by the information emerging from our "aloof" exteroceptive senses,¹¹¹ the interoceptively-intensive site of the digestive tract, regulated by the enteric nervous system, is also where the external world becomes most intimately incorporated into the body. In Blake's

Bowlahoola, where homeostatic feelings (that best fit Damasio's general definition of feelings as informants of the state of life that also motivate the mind to act) emerge, the logic of the outline that distinguishes the inside from the outside, naturalized by the visual boundaries of the skin and skull, begins to break down. Gershon observes:

The space enclosed within the walls of the bowel, its *lumen*, is a part of the outside world. The open tube that begins at the mouth ends at the anus. Paradoxical as it may seem, the gut is a tunnel that permits the exterior to run right through us. Whatever is in the lumen of the gut is thus actually outside of our bodies, no matter how counterintuitive that seems. The body proper stops at the wall of the gut. Nothing is truly in us until it crosses that boundary and is absorbed; moreover, anything that moves across the intestine wall in the reverse direction, into the lumen, is gone.¹¹²

There are two senses of "running through" at work in this quote. The most obvious sense suggests that food which enters our mouths is shuttled out of our anus in a different form hours or days later. But what makes Gershon's research on the enteric nervous system so groundbreaking is that he demonstrates how profoundly the biochemical transformations that occur in the digestive tract permeate our bodies and brains. "We have two surfaces that separate our inside from our outside," he reminds us.¹¹³ The intestinal lining "separates us from an exterior that is no less real than that which confronts the skin," yet unlike the "straightforwardly impermeable" skin, our inner boundary must intelligently participate in digestion and absorption by permitting the right nutrients and molecules to pass *inside* the body from this exterior conduit.¹¹⁴ In an alternative sense to the cursory contact the phrase sometimes connotes, as the exterior "runs through" the organism's digestive interior, its impact is not locally restricted to the tube-like organ, but, via the intricate biochemistry by which we make use of it, is shot through the entire body and brain fabric of our organism. Gershon points out the enteric nervous system has been almost entirely overlooked by the medical community: "ignored, despised, and troublesome, its inner workings (both normal and abnormal) have escaped discovery. Its microcircuits have yet to be mapped, the chemical symphony played by its neurotransmitters still has not been heard, and even the scope of the behaviors it controls remains unknown."¹¹⁵ (And two decades later, Damasio still bemoans the scientific "neglect" that hampers our current understanding of it).¹¹⁶ Its impact on the biochemistry of feelings and interceptive function is increasingly undeniable.¹¹⁷ The literal incorporation of the external into the internal space during digestion does far more than absorb nutrients from our food, but complexly influences moods and cognition in ways that researchers are just beginning to explore.¹¹⁸ For counterintuitively to our visually-oriented assumptions—so powerfully informed by Newtonian geometry that defines the center of a circle by its distance from the circumference which itself cleanly cleaves internal from external space—the visceral center Blake calls "Bowlahoola & Allamanda" is where the external world most intimately enters the organism's interior, incessantly shaping body and mind from the inside out. As Leder notes, "the world itself shifts with a shift in the viscera."¹¹⁹

Hence, Blake insists that the "fall" sets in as interoceptive opakeness towards one's own center: "Albion's Circumference was clos'd: his Center began darkning."¹²⁰ The loss of our ability to feel and follow the biochemical signals emerging from our viscera, Blake implies, reverberates across the systematic reach of the interoceptive system. Although most of us do not know that we do not know, the implication of this subtle severance of the vagus nerve "separates the mountains from Man / and Left Man, a little grovelling Root, outside of Himself."¹²¹

Yet for Blake, this severance constitutes a Fall in the epic sense that merits the capital F because finding our way back to the center is neither easy nor obvious. If he is right—and I think he is—that the loss of visceral feeling is both real and systemic throughout modern, Western culture,

this severance nonetheless cannot be readily reversed by simply embracing *feelings* as the authentic guide to bodily knowledge. Jessica Wapner deftly explores the profound epistemological limitations that dog the nascent field of interoceptive research: how do you access or assess another person's inner sensations? How do you make sense of your own? Citing one of the few studies to comprehensively explore how interoceptive sensitivity and sensibility might work, Wapner points out that the "accuracy of the process" by which our minds translate "incremental somatic changes" "into a single feeling" "can vary at every step."¹²² The challenge of listening to the body, Wapner deftly observes, is that "even if you're receiving a strong signal from your body, it can be inaccurate. Consistently perfect interoception is impossible: sometimes we listen to our hearts, but they have the wrong message; at other times the message is right, but we don't hear it. The body itself changes our capacity to listen." If "feelings are *for* life regulation, providers of information concerning basic homeostasis or the social conditions of our lives," why does following them so often lead us astray?¹²³

Untangling the knots in this question will require additional lines of inquiry, but we might begin to glimpse a hint in the qualifier to Damasio's confidence in the accuracy of feelings: "It is remarkable to consider that in general we do not need to visit our physician to discover if the fundamentals of our health are fine. Nor do we need a blood test for this purpose. Feelings provide us with a moment-to-moment perspective on the state of our health."¹²⁴ However, he notes, "emotional feelings can mask the ongoing, spontaneous homeostatic feelings and prevent them from delivering a clear message."¹²⁵ Where, along the scale of subtle and sudden sensations, does the subject emerge out of--and distinguishes its *own* agenda apart from (and sometimes destructive to) -- the homeostatic regulation of the organism?

fall into dualism

At and before birth, we all knew how to be good enough organisms. True, a human newborn needs an astonishing level of round-the-clock care. But if it has exited as a full term and relatively healthy baby, it knows—after months of practicing inhaling and exhaling amniotic fluids in the uterus—how to breathe with its first breath. And the newborn also knows when it is hungry or soiled and it knows how to let everyone around it know this too. It is the sureness of this knowing that Simone Weil touches on when she writes, "a child does not stop crying if we suggest to it that perhaps there is no bread. It goes on crying just the same."¹²⁶ What the human organism knows at birth is not the referential knowledge indicating the external state of affairs, but its internal awareness of its own homeostatic needs. Hence, the well-worn adage: *feed the infant on its cues*. For it knows its own bodily dictations, and your job as the caretaker is to learn to heed and follow them.

So how is it that three years later, my toddler screams *I'm not hungry I'm not hungry why do you think I'm hungry I'm really not hungry* before he finally starts shoving food in his mouth after rejecting his lunch for two hours? How did the human organism stop knowing how to take care of itself? How did we, as adults, lose touch with that practical awareness which Damasio calls feeling that indicates what we need and dictates our actions to meet those needs?

When Antonio Damasio describes the "two worlds inside our bodies," he presents them as distinct but largely aligned, together regulating homeostasis and crafting our sense of selfhood.¹²⁷ Yet the way that each internal world orients the mind and body, both in relationship to each other and to the organism's exterior, tugs in opposed directions. The new internal world (new in both evolutionary time and in the development of each organism) of our musculoskeletal interior provides "the stable form that anchors the edifice of selfhood."¹²⁸ The striated muscles that make up this "world" endow us with a robust sense of our own volition, confirmed each time our limbs feel

like our own because they seamlessly enact our will. By contrast, the old internal world—the "internal world of metabolism[...] of viscera such as the heart, lungs, guts, and skin, and of the smooth muscle that can be found everywhere in the organism where they help build the walls of blood vessels and the capsules of organs"—that is "concerned with basic homeostasis" largely recedes from our volition altogether.¹²⁹ According to Damasio's theory, the feelings that are generated in this new internal world that index the bodily sites of interoception inform us of our bodily states by "literally disturb[ing] us" and dictating directives to the mind. Hence, whereas we relate to the new internal world of our musculoskeletal frame through a sense of self-control, we relate to the old internal world through a recessive intimacy that *inverts* that self-control. The old internal world is old because it entails metabolic functions that all living creatures share in one form or another and because it was the first world that each member of our "premature" species inhabited before and at birth, when we lacked the muscular tone and control to lift our own heads. But if Lacan is right that human subjectivity takes form as we identify with the expectation of bodily control (however imperfect and limited in actual practice), the making of the subject also incurs the loss of intelligible access to the old internal world, which we retroactively experience as annihilation of the self. This loss not only limits the bodily experiences we can access, but it hampers our ability to work cooperatively *with* the interoceptive system that makes up the old internal world. For although that world of "our ancient chemical and visceral interior" can largely self-regulate on its own, it nonetheless requires that we respond to our own bodily dictates.¹³⁰

The two internal worlds also offer two radically divergent orientations towards the external world, only one of which we recognize as such. "Spatial reference," or proprioception, is generated by the new internal world, such that we know where our limbs are even when our eyes are closed.¹³¹ This spatial reference is largely collaborated by the information entering through our ocular nerves. We know how close things are to us by their proximity to the perimeter of our skull-and-skin-clad body. The familiar version of the body we know and naturalize—the version we observe as our own outlines in the mirror, the version we sense when we bump up against another body or object with embarrassment or agitation, the version that plants the self as the commanding center of self-possession—belongs to the assumptions of embodiment that emerge from and are anchored in the new internal world. In this world, we assume that what is external is outside of us and we incorporate it into our sphere of belonging and possession through control. In the old internal world, however, the external, in the form of food and air, runs through the internal spaces of the digestive track and the lungs, such that the visceral center is the circumference that mediates the porousness between the outside and the inside. As the proprioceptive spatial reference gives way to visceral depths of the old internal world, bodily *spaces* become accessible not through self-control but bodily sensitivity and recede from ocular verifiability. If this is the old internal world that we all inhabited as fetuses and newborns in "the mists of early life," we've largely lost the skill of *how* to inhabit this space as we mature, and as the axis of our sense of being shifts towards accruing self-control over our own bodies and the bodies of others.¹³²

For Blake, the two internal worlds—as the Western subject has learned to inhabit them—are anything but aligned. Although he presciently declares mind-body dualism to be a pernicious allusion that his work strives to eradicate, Blake nonetheless points to the tension between two modes of being-in-the-body, which Western culture has turned into a dualistic hierarchy such that the *interoceptive world* of receptive embodiment is literally uninhabitable for the human subject, at the cost of the health of the human organism.

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In a strikingly Blakean vein, neuroanatomist A. D. Craig speculates that dualism—the commonsensical illusion that the mind is a distinct entity from the body—arises from our early

childhood experiences of learning how to attend to our interoceptive signals.¹³³ "In particular," he points out, "our parents and guardians and other adults encouraged us to pay attention to the feeling from our bodies to develop our bodily awareness, in order to gain volitional control of bodily functions, especially urinating and excreting."¹³⁴ Not unlike the emergence of the self through Lacan's mirror stage, Craig suggests that we become dualistic subjects as our bodily dictates diverge from the mind's decrees and desires. Even as the child hones his bodily awareness (*do I need to go potty?*) through parental encouragement, he also learns that social politeness requires that he sometimes check his bodily dictates (*yes I do, but not here and now--wait until I find a toilet*). At other times, he (that is, the mind) may want to go or avoid going, but the body refuses to obey the mind's commands and instead behaves autonomously: the child thus experiences the internal limits of his volition as it encounters his body's refusal. (For Augustine, this internal limit is the effect of original sin: that our bodies are not fully subject to our will is a form of divine punishment). Yet for all that the body evades our conscious control or even our awareness, Craig reminds us of the basic tenets of his neuroscience discipline: the body's autonomy is not mindless. What Lacan calls the *corps morcelé* (discombobulated body) is actually intricately organized: "Our bodies in fact contain a widespread network of fibers and nerve cells called the *automatic nervous system* (ANS) which is a nonvolitional visceromotor system that controls the heart and all internal organs."¹³⁵ The automatic bodily functions that the mind does not control operate interoceptively: bi-directionally between brain and body, sensing, signaling, and self-regulating the homeostasis of the organism rather than fulfilling the desires of the subject.

The dualistic fracture between mind and body does not split evenly. Reiterating a commonsensical logic, Craig suggests that honing bodily awareness is directly in service of obtaining self-control over the body ("we pay attention to the feeling from our bodies [and] develop our bodily awareness in order to gain volitional control of bodily functions")¹³⁶—yet such control is checked not by other people "binding with briars [our] joys & desires" but by the homeostatic housekeeping of our own bodies which silently and persistently keeps us alive.¹³⁷ The desire to possess one's body as fully subjugated to one's will implicitly demands a body that lacks an automatic nervous system which (this is the definition of *automatic*, Craig reminds us) disregards our volition and slips our control. This desire is enshrined in the very concept of "automatic" in our automobile age, exacerbated by the ubiquity of self-driving cars that are beginning to populate our roads. We habitually experience the automatic as a surrendering of agency, ceding of our control to another decision-maker, in hopes that its more advanced calibrations can better serve our interests than our own accident-prone decision-making skills. In this sense, servitude—the automatic system seamlessly and obediently serving *us* subjects—marks the relationship we expect to have with the automatic systems that sustain us and facilitate our desires. (Imagine if your driverless Cruise taxi ignored your directions and started driving where *it* wanted to go!) But this analogy is misleading when applied to the nervous system: it has existed before subjectivity and often steps in to save us from our mistakes, such as the reflex that withdraws your hand from a hot pan. In this sense, subjectivity is the interloper that sometimes enables and frequently hinders the homeostasis imperative of the automatic nervous system. This hinderance may very well be the source of what Freud calls the death drive, but it is also evident in much less dramatic circumstances: the toddler refusing to come inside for dinner and ignoring his bathroom signals because he wants to keep on playing.

Blake locates the problem with dualism in that very goal of self-control, which is counter-intuitive because we take it to be self-evidently desirable. Enshrined within Western paradigms of freedom that valorize the autonomy of the *subject*, self-control implicitly identifies the self with the desiring mind over the brain-body's self-regulating autonomy. Blake condenses his critique of dualism into the recurring character of his main antagonist, Urizen. In the *The [First] Book of Urizen*,

the titular character refuses embodiment by seeking to tyrannize all bodies, and becomes frustrated when “he saw”

That no flesh nor spirit could keep
His iron laws one moment.

For he saw that life liv’d upon death.
The Ox in the slaughter house moans
The Dog at the wintery door.¹³⁸

As the subsequent stanza suggests in abruptly shifting from lawbreaking human subjects to the homeostatic needs of animal bodies, the problem with “his iron laws” isn’t just that they are issued from above by some transcendent deity or “arbitrary dictator” to demand obedience from subjects who refuse to be docile, but even more profoundly, that they ignore or violate the basic homeostatic imperative of bodies. Blake’s most subtle and trenchant critique, however, is that this isn’t just what the laws do to us; it’s what we inadvertently did to ourselves in becoming (dualistic) subjects whose sense of selfhood is sustained by the obedience of our bodies to our will.

The [First] Book of Urizen dramatizes the fall into subjectivity by casting a dualistic consciousness (“in chains of the mind locked up”) into an embryonic body.¹³⁹ Urizen is a peculiarly unhappy embryo: “Like a human heart struggling & beating,”¹⁴⁰ he resists embodiment from his inception and experiences the very formation of his body as a painful binding restricting his sense of self:

a vast Spine writh’d in torment
Upon the winds; shooting pain’d
Ribs, like a bending cavern
And bones of solidness, froze
Over all his nerves of joy.¹⁴¹

Urizen’s fundamental error (Blake introduces him as the “mistaken demon of heav’n”) to feel “his nerves of joy” only in “the slumbers of abstraction” when he is still a “self-contemplating shadow.”¹⁴² When he finds himself in a body, unable to fully master himself through self-contemplation, he deems his circumstances to be “a state of dismal woe.”¹⁴³ Mirroring the early stages of embryonic development as the embryo builds anatomical pathways for neurological and metabolic connections within itself and its milieu, the formation of the circulatory and nervous systems is particularly appalling for Urizen: “In harrowing fear rolling round / His nervous brain shot branches / Round the branches of his heart.”¹⁴⁴ As his embryonic body consolidates and grows (“conglobing, trembling / Shooting out ten thousand branches”),¹⁴⁵ he experiences the very “nerves” and “veins” that coordinate the activity of his nascent organs and form his body out of its womb milieu as a fleshy prison. Urizen is Blake’s name for the form of life that perpetually detests embodiment, a being who never learns to inhabit the automatic body he acquires over the pregnant course of the poem.

Although Urizen is in no state to hear it, the poem subtly suggests the nerves that he so fears are not only crucial for carrying out his body’s physiological functions, but they also enable the a-rational forms of knowledge that Blake calls prophecy. Halfway through the lengthy, noisy gestation of Urizen’s body, the poem briefly pauses:

The bellows & hammer are silent now
A nerveless silence, his prophetic voice
Siez’d; a cold solitude & dark void
The Eternal Prophet & Urizen clos’d

Ages on ages rolld over them
Cut off from life & light frozen
Into horrible forms of deformity.¹⁴⁶

In one sense, this pause allows “that solitary one,” “silent, dark Urizen” a momentary retreat into his preferred state of pristine, disembodied solitude.¹⁴⁷ Blake specifies that this silence is “nerveless”—it is not the absence of external sounds or soundmakers, but the inner opakeness resulting from the cessation of the sensing and signaling functions of Urizen’s emerging nervous system. Analgesizing himself—“clos’d” and “cut off from life”—and freezing the incessantly if subtle transformations that sustain biological life and facilitate vital contact with other life forms, Urizen finally becomes the “solid without fluctuation” that he always sought.¹⁴⁸ Yet again and again, he recoils in horror when he gets what he desires: frozen form *is* deformation. In this stanza, Urizen shares his “clos’d” state with Los, Blake’s “Eternal Prophet” who loses “his prophetic voice” amidst the nerveless silence. “Cut off” from the subtle sensing and signaling of the life forms around him, the prophet, too, is unable to access his own prophetic faculties. What is it about the function of the nervous system that enables both the homeostasis of biological life and the insights of the prophetic voice? Blake’s aptly misspelt word offers a cue: “Siez’d” is a portmanteau of “ceased” (which is its most likely pronunciation and carries the narrative logic of silencing) and “seized” (as in *being seized*), the act of possession that is also an act of extraction and removal. However, whereas *seize* is in our everyday usage a strongly transitive verb that requires a clearly distinguished subject and object to make grammatical sense, Blake’s poetically precise usage here is strikingly intransitive: there is no one to do the seizing, nor is possession being transferred to anyone else. Acoustically and logically layered with *cease*, “Siez’d” suggests that the prophet has *seized up*: withdrawing into himself, he has stopped operating as his moving parts can no longer move. But when movement operates as signals across nerves, neurological activity does not actually cease, but rather—blocked—becomes uncoordinated and destructive to the body whose sensing and signaling it normally enables: a seizure. The “horrible forms of deformity” are the forms of embodiment that has cut themselves off from other bodies inside and out and blocked their own interoceptive activity: the most extreme bodily consequence of the dualism that Urizen’s disembodiment paradoxically still embodies.

The opakeness and rigidity that result from the “nerveless silence” are culturally contagious, and its geographical effects in the prophetic books are unevenly distributed (a point we’ll return to in other sections). Towards the end of *The [First] Book of Urizen*, a “Net of Religion” inadvertently created by Urizen ensnares his descendants.¹⁴⁹ “So twisted the cords, & so knotted / The meshes: twisted like to the / human brain,” the net structurally mimics a simple nervous system.¹⁵⁰ “The beginnings of nervous systems,” Antonio Damasio reminds us, portions of which still exist “in the brain stem of so many species, humans included [...] literally consisted of nerve nets, a reticulum or network of wires.”¹⁵¹ Yet even as “Religion” (at least the dominant Protestant Christian forms practiced in Blake’s cultural milieu) works on and through the human nervous system, Blake claims that its main effect is anesthetizing. Under this net,

...the Inhabitants of those Cities
Felt their Nerves change into Marrow
And hardening Bones began
In swift diseases and torments,
In throbbings & shootings & grindings
Thro’ all the coasts; till weaken’d
The Senses inward rush’d shrinking,
Beneath the dark net of infection.¹⁵²

Mirroring the “nerveless silence” that led to the “seizing” of the prophetic faculties, the inhabitants of Urizen’s milieu are “bound down” by their “narrowing perceptions.”¹⁵³ But if Urizen’s “nervous brain” could not tolerate the tender sensitivity of embodiment, his descendants inherit the opposite problem: they become “opake,” losing interoceptive awareness. Blake insists that the loss of neurological sensitivity includes the loss of social intimacy:

Beneath the Net of Urizen,
Perswasion was in vain;
For the ears of the inhabitants,
Were wither’d, & deafen’d, & cold:
And their eyes could not discern
Their brethren of other cities.¹⁵⁴

The Aristotelian senses (ears, eyes) continue to function, but with the shuttering of what Blake elsewhere calls “Internal light,” our ability to connect and coordinate with other bodies vanishes so completely that we become unaware that such embodied intimacy was ever possible.¹⁵⁵ It’s worth pausing here to take in the breadth and audacity of Blake’s claims of what we lost in the fall from interoceptive sensitivity: both bodily and psychiatric ailments (“swift diseases and torments”) as well as social disconnection (“Perswasion was in vain [...] their eyes could not discern /their brethan) all derive from this “nerveless silence.” Yet if these claims seem bizarre and incredible—made by a “vendor of magic carpets, crazy stories, picture books” from centuries ago who appeared crazy even to his contemporaries—consider this: Blake’s account prophetically resonates with the current state of research into what interoception does withinside our bodies and what happens when it becomes dysregulated.¹⁵⁶ Disruptions in interoceptive sensing or signaling, researchers are discovering, are a hidden yet crucial factor in a growing list of complex conditions, physical and psychiatric illnesses whose sources are rooted in metabolic disorders. The list currently includes: chronic pain, schizophrenia, obesity, autism, migraines, ADHD, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, irritable bowel syndrome, substance abuse, psychosis, strokes and neurodegenerative diseases.¹⁵⁷ And perhaps not surprisingly for our highly social species, both conscious and unconscious interoception awareness is crucial to the formation and processing of subtle social cuing and—bi-directionally—“social situations can elicit acute changes in interoceptive ability.”¹⁵⁸ The body’s ability to accurately sense and signal to itself and to others is crucial to the well-being of our *organism*—independently of our subjectivity, though it certainly affects the conditions under which we experience ourselves as subjects. So much of the immense and intricately connected social and bodily ailments that currently plague modern human life arise from dysregulation in a bodily system that Western scientists “discovered” only three decades ago.

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Blake’s observation that modern human subjectivity is the result of a culturally contagious fall into “nerveless silence” complicates Baruch Spinoza’s *conatus* (“each thing, *to the extent it is in itself*, strives to preserve in its being”) by emphasizing the gravitational weight of its qualifier. Although Spinoza is arguably one of the most nerve-friendly western thinkers (and the subject of several of Damasio’s books), *conatus* assumes a body that can fully sense itself. Such perfectly coordinated interoceptive awareness is perhaps why Spinoza calls the state of self-knowledge “sub specie aeternitatis” (under an aspect of eternity). Yet to be a modern human subject is precisely to not be “*in itself*”—in part because we have displaced the homeostatic imperative of the bodily *it* with the objectives of the desiring *I*. Culturally, we’ve traded the long apprenticeship of learning and honing the intelligence of meeting bodily needs for the self-determination we associate with following our desires. Our very sense of a Western, modern self is forged in flight from the impingements of bodily necessity. Even our attempts to reunite with our bodies—currently fostered by the booming “wellness” industry that aggressively markets products and experiences to continuously renovate our

fractured subjectivities—often adopt the profoundly dualistic form of a subject seeking to dominate and determine the object of his body that we call self-mastery. Urizen is the modern subject; the fall is not a singular event in some mythic pre-history passed on through stories, but a constant occurrence through how we inhabit our material milieu, including the intimate surround of the body that we are, that presses too close for comfort. What Spinoza overlooks is the crack—call it Lacan's *vital debiscence*—that misaligns the desires that orient the subject from truly serving our homeostatic needs. To assume a self-preservation of being that not only persists over time but fully saturates its own materiality with self-awareness only further obscures the hidden reality of our interoceptive opakeness.

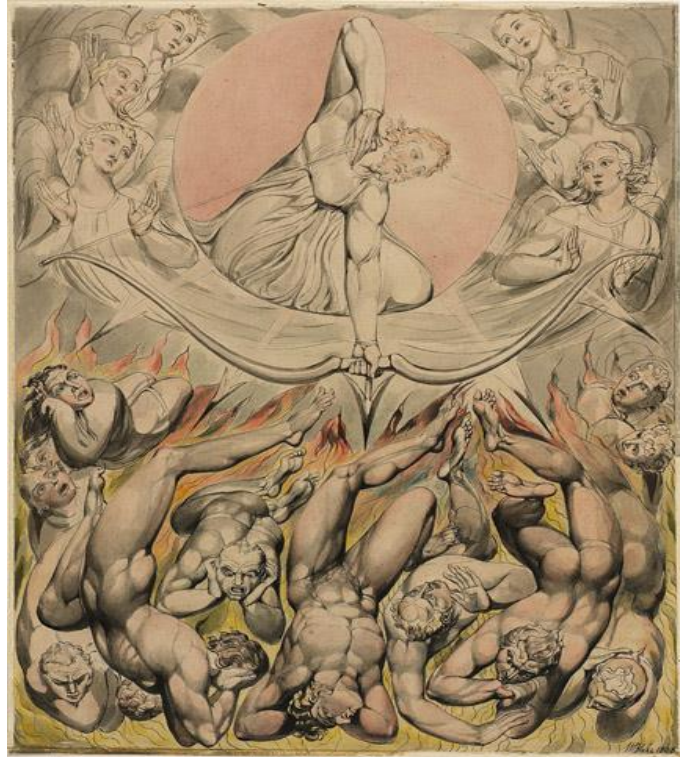
But how we tell ourselves the story of this Fall matters, especially in determining the remedies that we seek. If the marketing ploys are effective, it is partially because the wound they promise to treat is real. Blake's incessant re-visions of that story—as catalogues of the fallen senses woven into his prophecies, as poetic ditties scrawled in his unpublished notebook, as the salutary voice of the Devil in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, as illustrations that depict and depart from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as a bizarrely anti-climatic bromance in his own epic poem, *Milton*—all insist that the Genesis version (including Milton's retelling of it) got it catastrophically wrong. We did not fall out of a pristine state and into our defiled embodiment; rather, we fell out of interoceptive bodily awareness and into our present dualistic consciousness, which disciplines or ignores the existence of the body when it is disobedient to our desires. Although the fall is exacerbated by external material conditions and cultural expectations, its location is minute and internal, our awareness of and responsiveness to the most insignificant bodily signals that are largely invisible to others. In this sense, the fall is both materially located in our nervous system *and* shapes our perception of material reality.

Blake's most radical revision of Milton is to shift the scene of the fall away from the grand narrative arc of external rebellion (which turns Milton's Satan into a rebel hero) to the interoceptive "opakeness" that covers Satan's hidden heart. This is why Blake's Satan cuts such an unfamiliar figure from the dashing and persuasive devil we learned to admire from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. In Blake's *Milton*, Satan (not to be confused with the "voice of the devil" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) is a passive-aggressive character who mismanages his intimate relationships and can't read his own bodily intimations.¹⁵⁹ Whenever I teach *Milton*, even my most attentive students are confused by *when* the fall happens. They usually don't realize it has occurred at all until Satan is defending himself in court, at which point they begin flipping back through the plates, trying to piece together what *did* happen. The insignificance of the bodily event that is so easily overlooked is part of Blake's point. For the fall is not so much the result of what Satan or any character *does* to another character, but how one's relationship with the intimate inhabitation of the body literally constitutes our experience of reality. For "Satan is Urizen," Blake reminds us: these minute interoceptive miscommunications inside our bodies and with the bodies of others is at the heart of both individual and social ills.¹⁶⁰

Although Milton had promised to "justify the ways of God to men," few readers who have engaged deeply with *Paradise Lost* close the book with the feeling that Milton's God was just.¹⁶¹ Milton's depiction of the devil as a charismatic rebel at the beginning of the poem is arguably his most pervasive cultural legacy, one that circulates today in the rebellious heroic archetypes that still hold magnetic power to draw audiences—and, increasingly, to peddle products and experiences and galvanize our identification. But if Blake (perhaps Milton's best reader) was right that Milton was "of the Devil's party without knowing it," his own answer was to continuously sharpen our awareness of the crisis rather than join the resistance party.¹⁶² In one of his illustrations to *Paradise Lost*, Blake offers a powerful visual portrayal which suggests that Milton's vastly influential poem both

exemplified and exacerbated the separation of heat from light¹⁶³--he froze divine truth into a static image by exiling the *embodied* energy and action of human understanding.

In "Rout of the Rebel Angels," Blake depicts the moment when Jesus—the archer in the center whose body mimes Urizen in his most famous pose as the "Ancient of Days"—finally puts down the great rebellion and casts the rebel angels out of heaven. Even without the accompanying poem, the illustration conveys the dull, static order of heaven, whose pale, "passive & polite" (and bored?) angelic hosts seem removed from the scene even as they applaud their triumphant leader.¹⁶⁴ The expressive energy and the audience's eye instead follow the contorted, colorful bodies of the fallen angels, whose embodied gravity compels our allegiance even as the sharp division of the divine bow and arrow segregates heaven from the newly formed hell. Not surprisingly, the end of the war in heaven fails to restore stability in heaven or earth for long.



If Blake is indeed sympathetic to the devil—and I think he is—by the time he composes *Milton*, he has discovered a different mode of sympathy than the partisanship of rallying to the rebel's cause. The location of Blake's "war" is no longer waged on the epic stage or "internal theater" or as an idea held fervently to fight against an external dictator. A war hits home differently when it takes place in the body, *as* your body, generated by the minute particularities of your neural coordination and discoordination that shape your consciousness. What happens when we realize that there is no tyrannical God to overthrow, no external cause to scapegoat for our internal yet very real distress? Would we still be "of the devil's party" if the figure of rebellion were no longer an irresistible bad boy leading the charge, but a dysregulated, neurodivergent child rejecting food and harming himself as he screams with hunger that he does recognize? Or a fentanyl addict, for whom the most cherished source of what feels good is what is killing him? Supporting that child or addict—the neurodiversity of the former can put him at much higher risk of becoming the latter—would not mean fighting for or against his desires, but skillfully binding him to the bodily necessities he rejects under the flag of individual freedom.¹⁶⁵

¹ The question of Blake's madness is a recurring topic among both his contemporaries and twentieth century scholars. In one of the few published reviews of Blake's work, Robert Hunt famously complains that Blake is an "unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement." Robert Hunt, *The Examiner*, 17 September 1809, in G E Bentley (ed), *Blake Records: Second Edition* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 282-3. For more modern analysis, see Paul Youngquist, *Madness and Blake's Myth* (Penn State UP, 1989).

² Blake's letter to Thomas Butts, Felpham, April, 25 1803. *E* 728-9.

Blake's letter to Thomas Butts, Felpham, July, 6 1803. *E* 730.

³ Blake's letter to William Hayley, Lambeth, May 6, 1800. *E* 705.

⁴ Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert Loudon (Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2006), 22.

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- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 11, E 38. Henceforth *MHH*.
- ⁹ Kant, *Anthropology*, 23.
- ¹⁰ *Anthropology* 22-3.
- ¹¹ *Anthropology* 22.
- ¹² Blake, *Milton* plate 2, E 96.
- ¹³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey. Hogarth Press, London. 1961. p. 65.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 65-66.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 66.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ In the *Ego and the Id*, Freud insists that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego," but what he means by "body" seems to sound a Kantian ego: it "is itself the projection of a surface." In his notes, he clarifies: "the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides as we have seen above, representing the superficialities of the mental apparatus." The body, in this sense, is the bodily surface *seen from the outside*. Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," *The Standard Edition Vol XIX (1923-1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 26.
- ¹⁹ *Jerusalem* 38, E 185. Henceforth *J*.
- ²⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: Cape and Smith, 1930), 57-146, 65.
- ²¹ *MHH* 9, E 37.
- ²² Drew Leder, "Inside Insights: A Phenomenology of Interoception," *The Interoceptive Mind: from Homeostasis to Awareness*, ed. Manos Tsakiris and Helen De Preester (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019), 307-322, 310.
- ²³ Richard Shusterman. "Self-Knowledge and its Discontents," *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 68-90, 73. It's worth noting, however, that for Shusterman, the "somaesthetics" that he values emphasizes cultivating self-control over the body, such that even as the mind reaches into the body, it does so in order to recruit the body to serve the goals and intentions of the mind.
- ²⁴ See, for example, Barbara Strafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT P, 2002); Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990); Richard Shusterman's *Thinking through the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012).
- ²⁵ Leder, "Inside Insights," 317.
- ²⁶ Kate Mann, "What if Food Noise was just Hunger?" opinion essay in the *New York Times*, December 29, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/29/opinion/food-noise-hunger-diet.html>
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Philip Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002).
- ³¹ For a discussion of both the history and the current relevance of enthusiasm, see Steven Goldsmith, "The Future of Enthusiasm," *Blake's Agitation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkin's UP, 2014), 1-42.
- ³² Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 23
- ³³ J. G. A. Pocock, "Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 1/2, *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe 1650-1850* (1997), 7-28.
- ³⁴ Jon Mee. *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 7, 23.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 5
- ³⁶ Michael D. Gershon, *The Second Brain: The Scientific Basis of Gut Instinct and a Groundbreaking New Understanding of Nervous Disorders of the Stomach and Intestine* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), xi.
- ³⁷ E 645.
- ³⁸ Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 257.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 292.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 292-3.

⁴¹ I borrow the quote from Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, 165. For more on "Fantomina," see my first chapter "the expressive order of the face."

⁴² Blake, *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, E 564.

⁴³ Blake uses the phrase "dull round" in several different places, each time marking the sense of exhaustion that is unable to observe the minute particularities of reality:

"The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round even of a univer[s]e would soon become a mill with complicated wheels." (*There is No Natural Religion* 5, E 2)

"If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again." (*There is No Natural Religion* 9, E 3)

"so as it always happens, and not in that dull way that some Historians pretend, who being weakly organized themselves, cannot see either miracle or prodigy; all is to them a dull round of probabilities and possibilities; but the history of all times and places, is nothing else but improbabilities and impossibilities; what we should say, was impossible if we did not see it always before our eyes." (*Descriptive Catalogue*, E 543)

⁴⁴ The quote is from *The Song of Los* plate 4, E 68. Blake's critique of the "five senses" for constricting sensory-perception shows up frequently throughout his prophetic works written in the 1790s:

"But in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses. & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!" (*MHH* 6, E 35)

"When I came home; on the abyss of the five senses, where a flat sided steep frowns over the present world...." (*MHH* 6, E 35).

"How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?" (*MHH* 7, E 35)

They told me that the night & day were all that I could see;
"They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up.
And they inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle,
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning
Till all from life I was obliterated and erased" (*Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 2, E 47).

"when the five senses whelm'd
In deluge o'er the earth-born man; then turn'd the fluxile eyes
Into two stationary orbs" (*Europe* 10, E 63).

"For thou hast touch'd my five senses & they answer'd thee Now I am nothing" (*Four Zoas*, E 324).

⁴⁵ The definition of "sixth sense" in most dictionaries reinforces the normalcy of the five senses. The Collins English Diction lists "sixth sense" as "any supposed sense of means of perception, such as intuition or clairvoyance, other than the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell." This "supposed" sense, the definition implies, isn't as real or reliable to the same degree as the five orthodox senses.

⁴⁶ *MHH* 4, E 34.

⁴⁷ Ed Yong. *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us* (New York: Random House, 2022), 5

⁴⁸ *MHH* 7, E 35.

⁴⁹ Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, trans. Joseph D. O'Neil (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010). Cited in Yong, *An Immense World*, 6.

⁵⁰ *J* 30, E 177.

⁵¹ *All Religions are One*, E 1.

⁵² Yong, *An Immense World*, 12.

⁵³ *There is No Natural Religion* plate b3, E 2. Blake prints two radically different versions of *There is No Natural Religion*. Version A emphasizes how perception is limited by the sensory organs. Version b (which includes this plate) emphasizes the possibility of perception beyond the perceptive organs. Blakean scholars have long debated the relationship between the two versions. But if we take into account the recent neuroscientific discoveries that we possess far more than our five senses, what may appear to be a conflict between the two versions instead points at the "subtle" senses, physiologically grounded in the body yet unattached to discrete organism, that have long eluded both western philosophers and scientists and our commonsensical understanding of our own sensory-perception.

⁵⁴ I find these articles and essays especially helpful as a starting point into interoception research for humanities scholars:

Noga Arikha, "The Interoceptive Turn," *Aeon*. June 17 2019. <https://aeon.co/essays/the-interoceptive-turn-is-maturing-as-a-rich-science-of-selfhood>

Drew Leder, "Inside Insights," *The Interoceptive Mind*.

Jessica Wapner, "The Paradox of Listening to Our Bodies," *The New Yorker*, July 6 2023.

<https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/the-paradox-of-listening-to-our-bodies>

"How Emotions are Made," Maria Popova's review of Lisa Feldman Barrett's *How Emotions are Made*. 23 February 2024. <https://www.themarginalian.org/2024/02/23/how-emotions-are-made/>

⁵⁵ Dennis Proffitt and Drake Baer, *Perception: How Our Bodies Shape Our Minds* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, New York, 2020), 83.

Annie Murphy Paul, *The Extended Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021), 22.

⁵⁶ Antonio Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing: Making Minds Conscious* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2021), 92.

⁵⁷ *Europe* plate 12, E 64.

⁵⁸ The question of how to define feelings is currently contested among interoception researchers and philosophers. Damasio's feelings--which colloquially translates his "somatic markers"--are almost by definition all viscerception. But his usage of feelings often open up a complex question: *who or what is interpreting the feelings?* Consider this passage: "Vague, approximate, or precise, feelings are informative. They carry important knowledge and implant that knowledge firmly within the mind-flow. Is the breathing easy or labored?" (*Feeling and Knowing*, 73.) These questions are not necessarily asked or answered by the conscious mind, but they are constantly tracked by the body, which self-adjusts in response to what it surveys.

⁵⁹ Darwin wrote this in his copy of Robert Chamber's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844). *Charles Darwin's Marginalia* (Oxford: Routledge, 1990), 164.

⁶⁰ Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing*, 28.

⁶¹ Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions are Made* (New York: Mariner Books, 2018), 79.

⁶² John Coates, *The Hour Between Dog and Wolf: How Risk Taking Transforms Us, Mind and Body* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 98.

⁶³ Antonio Damasio, *The Strange Order of Things* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 21-22

⁶⁴ *The Extended Mind*, 40.

⁶⁵ *Strange Order*, 12, 12, 120.

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 129.

⁶⁷ *Strange Order* 83. "Feeling provide us with knowledge of life in the body and, without missing a beat, makes the knowledge conscious. [...] This is a pivot, fundamental process, and yet, in a most ungrateful manner, we barely notice it, distracted as we are by the thunder of another branch of knowledge, the one constructed by the sensory systems--vision, hearing, body sensations, taste, and smell--with the help of memory. The maps and images created on the basis of sensory information become the most abundant and diverse constituents of mind, side by side with the ever present and related feelings. More often than not, they dominate the mental proceedings" (*Feeling and Knowing* 29).

⁶⁸ "[W]hen people casually think of consciousness, they are thinking of the external world first. They often equate being conscious with the ability to map our external surroundings." (*Feeling and Being*, 151)]

⁶⁹ *Europe* iii, E 60.

⁷⁰ *MHH* 14, E 39; *MHH* 12, E 38.

⁷¹ Damasio give the example of how the eyes sees: "the reason I devote so much attention to the notion of the sensory portal has to do with its role in the generation of perspective. Let me explain. Our vision, for example, is the result of an enchainment of processes that begin in the retina and continue across several stations of the visual system--for example, the optic nerves, the superior geniculate nuclei and superior colliculi, the primary and secondary visual cortices. But to produce vision, we also need to engage in the *acts of looking and seeing*, and those acts of accomplished by the *other* structure of the body (varied muscular groups) and of the nervous system (motor control regions), *separate from the visual system stations*. Those other structure are located at the visual sensory portal[....]all these structures and their respective organs are well coordinated with the primary visual process but are not part of it." (*Strange Order*, 82)

⁷² Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing*, 151.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 151-2.

⁷⁴ Damasio, *Strange Order*, 80.

⁷⁵ Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing*, 144.

⁷⁶ Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing*, 142. Also see Damasio, *Strange Order*, 80.

⁷⁷ Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing*, 94.

⁷⁸ But the Fires of Los, rage

In the remotest bottoms of the Caves, that none can pass

Into Eternity that way, but all descend to Los

To Bowlahoola & Allamanda & to Entuthon Benythion. (*M* 37, *E* 138)

Blake's insists that the viscosity of "Bowaholla & Alhamanda" is what saves us from the levitation and abstraction of feeling into sentiment: "Were it not for Bowlahoola & Allamanda No Human Form but only a Fibrous Vegetation A Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision (*Milton* 24, *E* 120).

⁷⁹ *Milton* 24, *E* 121.

⁸⁰ *Milton* 24, *E* 120-1.

⁸¹ *J* 25, *E* 170.

⁸² See the rest of this passage, *Milton* 24, *E* 120-1, lines 60-67. Doctor, researcher, and science writer Siddhartha Mukherjee uses a similar "concert" metaphor in *Song of the Cell: An Exploration of Medicine and the New Human*. (Simon and Schuster, 2023).

⁸³ "[...] incomprehensible

to the vegetated Mortal Eye's perverted & single vision

the Bellows are the Animal Lungs. the hammers, the Animal Heart,

The Furnaces, the Stomach for Digestion, terrible their fury." (*J* 53, *E* 202)

⁸⁴ *J* 34, *E* 134.

Similarly, the "gates that open behind Satan's seat to the City of Golgonooza" are the "brain and heart and loins" (*M* 20, *E* 114).

⁸⁵ This description is cited from Coates, *Hour Between*, 110-111.

⁸⁶ Coates, *Hour Between*, 113.

⁸⁷ The pairing occurs at least seven times throughout *Milton* and *Jerusalem*: *E* 120, 123, 125, 127, 138, 183.

⁸⁸ Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Easson, *Milton by William Blake*, (Boulder: Shambhala Press, 1978), 144.

Although the neuroscientists would remind us that the inverse is more likely accurate. "Nervous systems emerged as servants to the rest of the organisms--to bodies, more precisely--not the other way around. It is arguable that to a certain extent they remain servants today." (Damasio, *Strange Order*, 56).

⁸⁹ "The nervous system is a part of the organism it serves, specifically a part of its body, and that holds close interactions with the body" [...] "the nervous systems began their existence as assistants to the body, as coordinators of the life process in bodies complex and diversified enough that the functional articulations of tissues, organs, and systems as well as their relationship to the environment required a dedicated system to accomplish the coordination. Nervous systems were the means to achieve that coordination and thus became an indispensable feature of complex multicellular life." (Damasio, *Strange Order*, 64, 66).

⁹⁰ I draw the one hundred million neuron estimate is from Michael Gershon's seminal work on the enteric nervous system. Michael D. Gershon. *The Second Brain: The Scientific Basis of Gut Instinct and a Groundbreaking New Understanding of Nervous Disorders of the Stomach and Intestine* (New York, HarperCollins, 1998), xiii. However, twenty-five years after the book's publication, this is likely a drastic undercount. More recent research puts the estimate at 400-600 million. See Mark A. Fleming, II, Lubaina Ehsan, Sean R. Moore, and Daniel E. Levin, "The Enteric Nervous System and Its Emerging Role as a Therapeutic Target," *Gastroenterology Research and Practice*, (September 2020). [10.1155/2020/8024171](https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/8024171)

⁹¹ Damasio, *Strange Order*, 135, 134.

⁹² Coates, *Hour Between*, 110. For more on the enteric nervous system, see Gershon's groundbreaking book, *The Second Brain*. The gut "is the only organ that contains an intrinsic nervous system that is able to mediate reflexes in the complete absence of signals from the brain or spinal cord. [...] We have more nerve cells in our gut than in the entire remainder of the peripheral nervous system. The enteric nervous system is also a vast chemical warehouse which is represented every class of neurotransmitters found in the brain. Neurotransmitters are the words nerve cells use for communicating with one another and with the cells under their control. The multiplicity of neurotransmitters in the bowel suggests that the language spoken by the cells of the enteric nervous system is rich and brainlike in complexity. Neuroscientists, whose horizon ends at the holes in the skull, are continually amazed to find the structure and components cells of the enteric nervous system are more akin to those of the brain than to those of any other peripheral organ" (xiii).

⁹³ Coates, *Hour Between*, 113.

⁹⁴ Coates, *Hour Between*, 113. Also see Gershon's *Second Brain*, 6-7.

⁹⁵ The Yale Mellon Center (which currently curates this plate) describes this plate as "it shows Albion being disembodied." Also see Morten Paley, "Two Sources," <https://bq.blakearchive.org/5.3.paley>

⁹⁶ Morton D. Paley. "Two Pictorial Sources for *Jerusalem 25*," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 5:3 (Winter 1971-2), 185-190, 186.

⁹⁷ *J 24, E 170*.

⁹⁸ "[N]oiception [pain] and thermoreception are aspects of interoception, not exteroception, because they report aspects of the physiological condition of the body conveyed by small-diameter sensory fibers and the spinothalamic pathway to the interoceptive cortex. The research in this book demonstrates that feelings of pain and temperature are based on activity in body maps that occupy specific portions of interoceptive cortex." A. D. (Bud) Craig. *How do you Feel? An Interoceptive Moment with your Neurobiological Self*, (Princeton, Princeton UP, 2015), 4.

⁹⁹ Although most of the time, pain is extremely useful for prompting consciousness to attend to the body to minimize tissue damage, it does not corollate to tissue damage--especially in the case of chronic pain, which are dysregulations of the interoceptive system no matter where the pain is "felt."

For a description of how pain becomes chronic, see, Alban Latremolire and Clifford J. Woolf. "Central Sensitization: A Generator of Pain Hypersensitivity by Central Neural Plasticity," *The Journal of Pain* 10:9 (September 2009), 895-926. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpain.2009.06.012>

¹⁰⁰ For example, see Blake's description of Orc, especially in *America: A Prophecy* and *Europe: A Prophecy*.

¹⁰¹ Leder, *"Inside Insight,"* 318.

¹⁰² *J 25, E 170*.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing*, 74. italics original.

¹⁰⁷ Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing* 74.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 92. See Damasio's discussion of the "pervasive lack of myelin insulation in a majority of interoceptive neurons" and the absence of the blood-brain barrier in "notable in brain regions related to the interoceptive process," which together "allow signals from the body to interact with neural signals directly" (*Feeling and Knowing*, 92-94). Damasio also discusses both in *Strange Order of Things*, 128-133.

¹¹⁰ Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing*, 74-5.

¹¹¹ "[T]he retinal maps that help us to see, or the skin corpuscles that help us touch, accomplish miracles of detection and description, but they are aloof devices relative to our lives." (Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing* 88)

¹¹² Gershon, *The Second Brain*, 84. The quote continues: "If we bleed into the lumen of the bowel, the blood is as lost from us as it is when it drips on the floor. When an alcoholic bleeds from varicose (swollen and bulging) veins in the lumen of the esophagus, he or she can easily bleed to death. A fatal hemorrhage can thus occur without a drop of blood being externally visible. Even water moving from the body proper into the lumen of the gut can be as lethally dehydrating as a trip through the Sahara without a canteen. Diarrhea kills babies by drying them out just in this way, and cholera is a fatal disease for the same reason." (84)

Gershon's sobering examples of how fluid loss *into* the digestive tunnel (even when that fluid remains inside the perimeter of the skin) is sufficiently *outside* "the body proper" to kill the organism might remind us that "outside within" is not a metaphor, or a framework that becomes real only when consciousness adopts it.

¹¹³ Ibid, 84.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Gershon, *The Second Brain*, xiv.

¹¹⁶ "That so many oddities in the body-brain relationship have not been known or have been overlooked is surprising. One of the most surprising concerns the neglect accorded to the enteric nervous system [...] It is rarely referred to in medical teachings. When it is referred to at all, it is generally treated as a "peripheral" component of the nervous system. It has not been studied in detail until recently. It is practically absent from scientific treatments of homeostasis, feelings and emotions, and that includes my own ventures in those areas in which the references to the enteric nervous system have been overly cautious." (Damasio, *Strange Order*, 134)

¹¹⁷ For two well-researched works directed towards non-specialists, see Ed Yong, *I Contain Multitudes: The Microbes Within Us and a Grander View of Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016) and Emeran Mayer, *The Mind-Gut-Immune Connection: Understanding how Food Impacts Our Mind, Our Microbes, and Our Immunity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2023).

¹¹⁸ Meenaskhi Rao and Michael D. Gershon, "The Bowel and Beyond: The Enteric Nervous System in Neurological Disorders," *Nature Reviews Gastroenterology & Hepatology*, 13 (2016), 517-528. [10.1038/nrgastro.2016.107](https://doi.org/10.1038/nrgastro.2016.107)

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- ¹¹⁹ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 52. It's not insignificant that Leder turns to poetry to describe the feeling of this shift. Poetic labor, Blake might suggest, follows the visceral in the poet's body as it indexes a subtle but significant--and without the amplification of poetry, often unseen--shift in the world, made palpable to more opaque bodies than the poet's own.
- ¹²⁰ *J 19, E 64.*
- ¹²¹ *J 19, E 162.*
- ¹²² Jessica Wapner, "The Paradox of Listening to Our Bodies," *The New Yorker*. 6. July 2023.
<https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/the-paradox-of-listening-to-our-bodies>
- ¹²³ Damasio, *Strange Order*, 139.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 46.
- ¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 46.
- ¹²⁶ Simon Weil, "Forms of the Implicit Love of God," *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 137-215, 210.
- ¹²⁷ See "The Priority of the World Within" and "Consciousness (De)Constructed", *Feeling & Knowing*, 151-2, 141-4.
- ¹²⁸ Damasio, *Feeling and Knowing*, 152.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 142
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 152.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid*, 152.
- ¹³² Damasio, *Strange Order*, 114.
- ¹³³ A.D Craig's research is seminal to interoceptive studies. As a "functional neuroanatomist," Craig discovered "two complete separate anatomical pathways" for "ascending sensory activity" traveling from the body to the brain, including a "small-diameter sensory pathway" that specifically carries interoceptive information. He observes, "one of the conceptual advances from my research is the enlargement of the term *interoception* to include the small-diameter sensory input from the whole body--not only from the viscera, muscles, joints, and teeth, but also from the skin." (*How Do You Feel?* 4)
- ¹³⁴ A.D. Craig, *How Do You Feel*, 7-8.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p.8.
- ¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8.
- ¹³⁷ Blake, "The Garden of Love," *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, E 26.
- ¹³⁸ E 81. I omit plate numbers for *Urizen* because there is no scholarly consensus on how the plates should be ordered--their lack of coherent order may very well be part of Blake's point.
- ¹³⁹ E 75.
- ¹⁴⁰ E 73.
- ¹⁴¹ E 75.
- ¹⁴² E 75, 81, 71.
- ¹⁴³ This phrase occurs at least seven times in *Urizen* (E 75, 76). It also recurs in similar descriptions of *Urizen's* formation in *Milton* and *The Four Zoas*.
- ¹⁴⁴ E 76.
- ¹⁴⁵ E 76.
- ¹⁴⁶ E 77.
- ¹⁴⁷ E 71.
- ¹⁴⁸ E 71.
- ¹⁴⁹ E 82
- ¹⁵⁰ E 82.
- ¹⁵¹ Damasio, *Strange Order*, 59.
- ¹⁵² E 82.
- ¹⁵³ E 83.
- ¹⁵⁴ E 83.
- ¹⁵⁵ In *Milton*, Blake declares: "Every thing in Eternity shines by its own Internal light," E 104.
- ¹⁵⁶ I borrow the phrase from Saree Makdisi's *William and the Impossible History of the 1790's*, (Chicago: U Chicago P, Chicago, 2007), 297.
- ¹⁵⁷ The current literature on interoceptive dysregulation is enormous. For example, see "Diseases, Disorders, and Comorbidities of Interoception," *Trends in Neurosciences*, 44:1 (January 2021), 39-51.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tins.2020.09.009>

For a recent article focusing on interoception and psychiatric dysregulation, see "A Primer on Interoception and Its Importance in Psychiatry," *Clinical Psychopharmacology and Neuroscience*, 21(2) (2023), 223-261. <https://doi.org/10.9758/cpn.2023.21.2.252>

¹⁵⁸ Andrew J. Arnold, Piotr Winkielman, Karen Dobkins. "Interoception and Social Connection." *Front Psychology* 10:2589, (2019). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6901918/>

¹⁵⁹ Satan, Blake suggests, does not understand his own feelings precisely because "self, believ'd" his own excuses. After switching tasks with Palambron and blotching the, "wept Satan before Los, accusing Palamabron, Himself exculpating with mildest speech. for himsel believ'd / That he had not oppress'd nor injur'd the refractory servants" (*Milton* 8, *E* 101).

¹⁶⁰ *Milton* 10, *E* 104.

¹⁶¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), book 1, ln 26.

¹⁶² *MHH* 6, *E* 35.

¹⁶³ I adapt this phrase from a line in Blake's *America*, which describes the emergence of the spirit of rebellion that he calls Orc: "heat, but not light went thro' the murky atmosphere" (*America* 4, *E* 53).

¹⁶⁴ In Blake's annotations to the writings of another poet, he bitterly remarks that the art world is not interested in "genius" but rather enquiring whether an artist "is Passive & Polite & a Virtuous Ass: & obedient to Noblemens Opinions in Art & Science. If he is; he is a Good Man: If Not he must be Starved" (*E* 642).

¹⁶⁵ Aleksandra M. Herman, "Interoception Within the Context of Impulsivity and Addiction," *Current Addiction Reports*, vol 10 (April 2023), 97-106. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-023-00482-7>

chapter three: Blake's genius

towards an "active physiognomy"

When Baruch Spinoza writes "no one has yet determined what the body can do,"¹ the bodily actions that interest him are those that elide our volitional control, that we tend to discount as *doing* because we did not initiate them: "sleepwalkers do a great many things in their sleep which they would not dare to awake."² Because most people are "so firmly persuaded that the body now moves, now is at rest, solely from the mind's command" we neither know nor care to know what our bodies can do when we are not telling them what to do.³ For our telekinetic familiarity with the portions of the body readily mobilized by our will weaves a powerful spell of forgetting that declines from our sense of embodied agency the vast, internal, and intricate assemblage of bodily organs and systems that we do not habitually control or, even, sense most of the time. Spinoza aims to disenchant this spell when he points to the chasm between what our bodies do and what our minds know of it: "for no one has yet come to know the structure of the body so accurately that he could explain all its functions."⁴ That "structure of the body"—which neuroscientists remind us isn't an inert form but includes the livewire reconfigurations of experience constantly enacted by our "incognito brains"—is largely masked by our very assumption of embodied agency.

When we lay claim to our bodies as the natural vehicles of our agency (*my body, my choice*), we rarely consider the many ways in which the body itself disobey the decisions we make. A doctor informs her patient that she is miscarrying a much-wanted pregnancy: "when the embryo doesn't progress as it should, the body has a way of taking care of it."⁵ But the body's caretaking of a non-viable life feels like a violation of the self. "She meant to be comforting," the patient reflects, "but I am left with the unsettling feeling that my body can make a decision without my consent."⁶ And yet all bodies, human and nonhuman, incessantly make decisions without asking for our consent: they must do so to keep us alive. From digestion, to sleep and dreaming, to pregnancy and childbirth, to thought itself, to the muscular movements that only *seem* volitional to consciousness, it is the very efficiency of these mostly silent, nonconsensual bodily acts that materially maintains our being beneath—and at times, against—the dictates of our wills. Each confrontation with this fundamental divergence between the body's vital decision-making and the subject's will unsettles the version of agency that understands itself through its mastery over the body.

"The body may even be the prime source of our very ideas of agency and freedom," writes Richard Shusterman, for "what could be a better, more fundamental paradigm of voluntary or willed action than the way we move our bodies to do what we will—raise a hand, turn the head?"⁷ But this willful version of agency, sinologist and scholar of comparative medicine Shigehisa Kuriyama reminds us, is not universal but peculiar to the "particular concept of personhood" whose birth he traces to Western antiquity and locates in the divergent gazes through which classical Greek doctors and artists, in contrast to their Chinese Ming Dynasty counterparts, viewed the human body.⁸ Whereas European artists chiseling bulging six-packs onto torsos "saw muscles as somehow essential to human identity," Chinese art and medical texts utterly ignored musculature in their depictions: "in fact, Chinese doctors lacked even a specific word for 'muscle'.⁹ "Musculature was a peculiarly Western preoccupation," Kuriyama suggests, because muscles, as Greek philosopher and physician Galen puts it, are "the organs of voluntary motion."¹⁰ Kuriyama elaborates: "muscles allow us to choose what we do, and when, and how; and this choice marks the divide between voluntary actions and involuntary processes. Muscles, in short, identify us as genuine agents."¹¹ This obsession—which has not abated yet and has spread far beyond the geographical West—is not merely an aesthetic preference for a specific body type, but, rather, "reflect[s] the birth of a new experience of embodied life and an altered perception of persons. Henceforth, the heart of all

readings of the body would be framed by the dichotomy opposing processes that merely happen, naturally or by chance, and actions initiated by the soul."¹² In the broadly Western paradigm of selfhood, the soul itself—or more specifically, the soul *enshrined* as the self—comes to be defined in sharp relief against the material processes unresponsive to the will. Agency in Western self-understanding becomes unimaginable except as agency *over* the body. The self who acts (rather than is acted upon) is the natural dictator of a body whose intimate rebellion then feels like a tragedy and betrayal.

Even recent philosophical accounts of embodiment presented as correctives to the brain-in-a-vat legacy of Cartesian dualism nonetheless subtly replicate the identification of the self with muscular agency. For the schism at the heart of Western self-knowledge does not just divide soul, or mind, from body, but also bifurcates between experiences of embodiment that fracture along the sense of control. "The body is [...] defined through its actional fields," Drew Leder writes, and "always refers back to my corporeal powers."¹³ Yet our naturalized association of muscles with volitional action is itself a telling over-generalization; among the three broad types of muscles in our body, only one—the striated muscles attached to our skeleton whose physiological changes beneath the skin can be easily detected—are readily accessible to the will and only for a limited range of our developmental lifespan. The feebleness that can accompany old age partially stems from muscular atrophy as both muscle mass and neurological responsiveness recedes. So, too, human infants are born with skeletal muscles but lack control over them. What Leder calls the "magical sway of motility" is acquired only slowly, from the neck down as the child learns to coordinate his body.¹⁴ That coordination is still fitful and fragmentary by the time the child reaches the age of Lacan's toddler, triumphantly and tragically exercising his muscular will to pull himself upright and gaze at himself in the mirror. But the mirror whose gaze inaugurates the Western self can only reflect the body's surface; what it misses—and what Western thinkers, scientists, researchers, and doctors had overlooked for centuries until the current "Copernican revolution" in the neurosciences—is the unseen configurations of internal space in the body and brain where consciousness is generated, largely beneath our habitual awareness.¹⁵ Even "the most influential writer on embodiment, Merleau-Ponty," Leder notes, focuses on external "perception and motility" and largely bypasses the intricate and vast realm governed by the interoceptive system in which "metabolism, sleep, visceral processes, birth, death" occur.¹⁶ This selective attentive to the body's surface is partially determined by the limitations of our interoceptive sensitivity to its depth: we neither see nor feel the brain or most interoceptive processes at work. Yet that limitation is also exacerbated by our self-fulfilling cultural prophecy normalizing internal "opakeness." The Western fixation on skeletal musculature—on volitional embodiment in which we locate our sense of selfhood and agency—also intensifies our aversion to the vast range of bodily processes that elide volition, which a culture that understands the self as a volitional agent comes to experience only as a terrifying and engulfing passivity, what Elaine Scarry calls "the body in pain." This is our loss, for it is through these visceral and often subtle somatic markers that the body guides consciousness to not only fulfill its needs, but through which it dictates embodied knowledge.

As the Western understanding of the body shifts radically, upended, at least among the experts, by the interoceptive revolution in the neurosciences that confronts researchers and doctors with how little we actually knew about what Spinoza called "the structure of the body," the longstanding paradigm of active and passive embodiment shaped by our muscular sense of agency is becoming obsolete—even as its legacy remains very much a part of our public consciousness, undergirding our sense of political and personal agency. How do we begin to comprehend the body and brain's activity in itself, independently of our control over it? How might we understand passivity not as physical stillness or silence that signifies a stymied will, but as interoceptive dysregulation whose complex behavioral, physical, and psychological manifestations are

symptomatic of both the body's struggle to coordinate withinside itself and with its surrounding bodies?

Towards the end of a letter to Thomas Butts detailing his recent misadventure with a soldier—one that landed him on trial for sedition—Blake makes a self-observation that upends our habitual sense of the difference between active and passive:

Perhaps the simplicity of myself is the origin of all the offences committed against me. If I have found this I shall have learned a most valuable thing well worth three years' perseverance. I have found it! It is certain! that too passive a manner, inconsistent with my active physiognomy had done me much mischief.¹⁷

Blake's insistence that the manner of his actions was "too passive" is curious since his own account of his behavior would seem to point towards the opposite conclusion. A few pages earlier in the same letter, he describes evicting a soldier from the garden surrounding his cottage in Felpham:

[the soldier's] Enmity arises from my having turned him out of my Garden into which he was invited as an assistant by a Gardener at work therein without my knowledge that he was so invited. I desired him as politely as was possible to go out of the Garden, he made me an impertinent answer I insisted on his leaving the Garden he refused I still persisted in desiring his departure he then threatened to knock out my Eyes with many abominable imprecations & with some contempt for my Person it affronted my foolish Pride I therefore took him by the Elbows & pushed him before me till I had got him out. there I intended to have left him. but he turning about put himself into a Posture of Defiance threatening & swearing at me. I perhaps foolishly & perhaps not, stepped out at the Gate & putting aside his blows took him again by the Elbows & keeping his back to me pushed him forwards down the road about fifty yards he all the while endeavouring to turn round & strike me & raging & cursing which drew out all several neighbors. at length when I had got him to where he was Quarterd. which was very quickly done.¹⁸

"Too passive a manner" is an odd caption for what is perhaps one of Blake's strongest articulations of muscular will. Dissatisfied even after expelling the impertinent visitor, Blake secures the soldier's hands behind his back as if placing him under citizen's arrest and force-marches him back to his quarters in front of their neighbors and the soldier's comrades. Scholars have struggled to make sense of Blake's self-evaluation, which ends with the curious claim that his strongman actions hinder rather than express his "active physiognomy."

Blake's claim that "we do not want either Greek or Roman Models" sits strangely alongside the countless chiseled, often naked Greco-Roman physiques that populate his drawings.¹⁹ His most memorable figures are undeniably ripped: in figure 1, the *elderly* "Ancient of Days" extends his power through his muscle-clad arm, the bulging musculature on his back and defined legs emphasized by shading. Blake's depiction of Isaac Newton in figure 2 transforms the scientist's small, slight stature, for which he was bullied as a child, into the rippling, almost rocky physique of a professional body builder. Yet what the current popularity of these images often overlooks is that Blake is highly critical of both figures; it is striking that his visual portrayal of these Olympiad bodies does not strike us as a critique.



Figure 1: "The Ancient of Days"²⁰

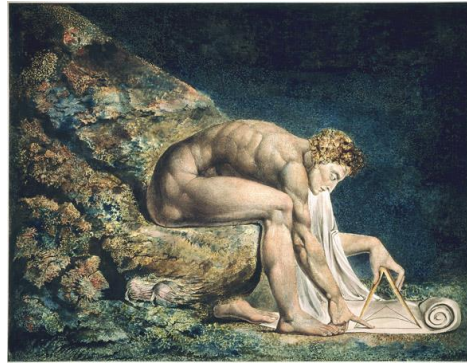


Figure 2: "Newton"²¹

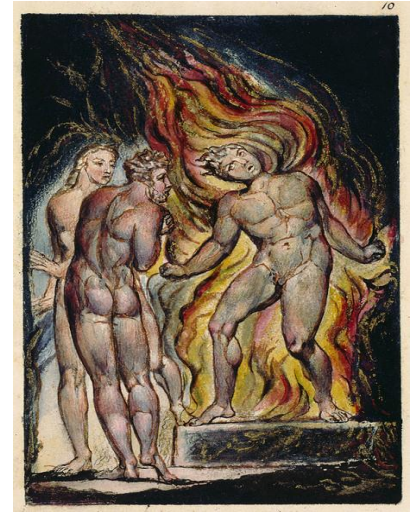


Figure 3: *Milton* plate 10²²

Perhaps even more so nowadays than during Blake's time, we have so naturalized the association of muscular agency with an active physiognomy that we do not fully comprehend the complexity of Blake's portrayals of bodily vigor. For all that he relishes depicting vivacious energy that "is the only life and is from the Body," he constantly points out that its source is hidden from our ken, sometimes masked by the very musculature we admire in his artwork.²³ At a pivotal moment in *Milton* depicted in figure 3 (which we will return to explore in depth later), Blake describes the articulated muscles of Satan's chest as "paved terraces" whose growth precipitates his own fall:

Thus Satan rag'd amidst the Assembly; and his bosom grew
Opake against the Divine Vision; the paved terraces of.
His bosom inwards shone with fires. But the stones becoming opake.
Hid him from sight.²⁴

Satan's strident act of expressing himself creates a cut physique that simultaneously cuts him off from accessing his own internal world, which becomes an "unfathomable Abyss."²⁵ For Blake, the fall into the constitution of Western selfhood, into what Kuriyama might call the articulation of muscular agency, is not a metaphorical fall from grace. Rather, it is a literal yet unperceived habit of interoceptive shuttering—one that would be visceral if it could be felt—against the body's "[i]nternal light" as the locus of consciousness veers away from the "Organs of Life" operating in the visceral depths to take up permanent residency in the body's muscular-skeletal circumference.²⁶ It is in this sense that Blake insists, a few lines later, that "Satan is Urizen."²⁷ Satan's raging articulation of his agency charts a different path from that of the Urizenic figure depicted in the "Ancient of Days," who issues "iron laws" that "no flesh nor spirit could keep"—including, Blake intimates, himself.²⁸ (In a couplet satirically entitled "To God," Blake writes, "If you form'd a Circle to go into / Go into it yourself & see how you would do").²⁹ Yet both lawgiver and lawbreaker inadvertently coordinate to restrict embodiment. Satanic rebellion converges with Urizenic rigidity in constructing and constricting the self as a geometric outline, a self-inscribed identity of a line defined antagonistically against the external world on one side and opake to its own internal milieu on the other.

For Blake, our ossification into a personhood constituted by muscular agency can lift--sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly, in ways that are literally nonsensical to narrative expectations and evade the meaning-making through which stories sketch a legally and socially legible self. In the 1803 letter to Butts that I cited earlier, the change comes out of nowhere. Within the span of two

sentences, Blake shifts from searching for a lesson (“if I have found this...”) to suddenly discovering (“I have found it!”) this “most valuable thing.” Since Blake does not bother giving us a reference for “this” or “is,” *what* he finds is impossible to parse as long as we keep searching for an external cause or a visible entity to explain his radical change. Even as he describes the shift occurring to him in the process of writing, *it* isn’t captured on the page. Whatever it may be is legible only as a tonal shift in a letter to a friend written in the turbulence of a protracted crisis, as Blake strives to understand his own actions in an incident in which he is both perpetrator and victim. What begins as a justification of his agency and actions—as if Blake is mentally rehearsing his trial statement to an imaginary judge—runs out of steam as he writes, his self-defense caving in on itself to suddenly become an aperture into his own inner workings.

What form of knowledge emerges in its wake?

genius is self-annihilation

Interviewing doulas six months into my first pregnancy, I encounter the rhetoric of self-empowerment over and over again: *own your own experience*. It’s what women seeking to off-road their birth experience want to hear: you are in the driver’s seat (but please stay within transfer distance of a hospital in case you start bleeding out or your baby turns blue). But I—the person asking questions, calculating risks, making decisions, devising a birth plan, signing a \$2,000 check—I have no idea how to drive. I am banking on ecstasy: that when I go into labor, the cocktail of hormones articulating my body will take over and steer with the reliability of bodily impulses, like the newborn rooting instinct or my fingers automatically retracting from the sizzling hot pan. *Can you teach me how to go along for the ride?*

Around the same time, I became obsessed with stories of women who gave birth while in a coma. (In Giambattista Basile’s 1634 version of a story that modernity has morphed into Disney’s saccharine sleeping beauty, she is assaulted, abandoned, and gives birth to boy/girl twins all while “asleep”—her daughter wakes her when her suckling removes the enchanted splinter from her mother’s finger). In the real-life cases that make the news, most women were already pregnant prior to the incident that landed them in a coma. But some spent the entirety of their pregnancy unconscious, like the woman in an Arizona care facility who had been in a vegetative state for years when she was raped by a caregiver and gave birth before anyone realized it. It’s rare, but it happens; I’m astonished and strangely reassured by the sheer fact that it *can* happen. Under duress, the body can grow a baby and push it out of itself without any directives from what we typically think of as ‘higher’ consciousness. The knowledge of how to give birth is part of our ancestral inheritance as viviparous mammals. There isn’t much need or use for what Nietzsche calls “cognition.”

Although I’m still too embarrassed to name the websites that I stalked, it was the keenly accurate sense of my personal inability that fueled my voyeurism. As I approached my due date, the unresolved identity crisis over my impending and unexpected motherhood was suddenly preempted by the terrifying geometric puzzle of how our bipedal species with narrow hips and oversized heads must navigate labor and delivery: the head is supposed to fit through *where?* *Are you sure it can?* Easy, hazy affirmations that *I can do it* only irritated me—I’m panicking precisely because I am so acutely aware that I have no idea what I’m doing. (By then, I had also been a teacher long enough to recognize the intellectual value of viscerally knowing that you don’t know.) So instead, I went hunting for confirmation that I do not actually need to know what I am doing in order to give birth. *Hey, if a woman in a vegetative state can do it, so can you.*

What is this *you* that can when the *I* finally knows that *I cannot*?

Colloquially, in American English, we tend to say *I cannot* when we actually mean *I may not*. This isn't just a grammatical nicety. The conflation reveals that our culture still conceptualizes *cannot* as a limitation from the outside: some external power restraining my will and my desire by force—or alternatively, by begrudgingly internalized self-restraint (*I shall not*). Other times, we use *cannot* as a synonym for the impossible: you cannot have it; what you want is against the immutable laws of physics. What is so difficult to conceptualize—or, more importantly, to *get* in everyday practice—is the version of *I cannot* that mark the limitations of the *I*'s willful exertion yet still leaves space to cooperate intelligently with the body's *it can*. How can we even conceive of this space when what it means to be an *I* in this language is to be *not-it*?

You conceive it, you don't conceive *of* it.

Leder describes the “I cannot” as a material bodily limit that checks the inner extension of the will which we habitually enact over our muscular-skeletal systems.

The foreignness of this inner body—the automaticity of the “it can,” demanding character of the “I must” [as in *I must throw up*]³⁰—ultimately refers back to the structure of a personal inability. I will term this the “I cannot.” I cannot act from my inner organs in the same way I can act from my surface musculature. Though I can lift my arm without any problem, I cannot in the same way choose to secrete a little more bile or accelerate my digestion. The “magical sway” I have over my own body that Merleau-Ponty describes thus refers primarily to the body surface. The depths involve an even deeper sorcery extending beyond my domain. [...] The curious nature of this “I cannot” can be correlated with the data of physiology. The surface body is covered with striated or voluntary muscle, connected by motor neurons directly to the central nervous system. This is not the case with the smooth muscle (and cardiac muscle) of the viscera. The contractile level of such muscle is modulated by the endocrine organs and the automatic nervous system. The digestive tract, for example, while utilizing striated muscle at its extremes, is surrounded by smooth muscle from two-thirds of the way down the esophagus until the anorectal juncture. Such transitions, visible to the scientist from without, correspond roughly to transitions in experience from within. Once the apple is swallowed it passes out of my domain of action, its intricate passage and absorption governed by the “it can.” Only when the stage of defecation is reached, do we claim a measure of personal command. We have resurfaced to the level of the “I can.”³⁰

Leaning into the orientation and language of his training as a physician, Leder's use of “surface” and “depth” recalibrates our commonsensical notion of the body as a screen for a disembodied soul to instead mark differences within our experience of embodiment distinguished by our sense of volitional control.³¹

The uterus, not unlike the recessive majority of the digestive tract, includes a layer of smooth, involuntary muscle which contracts to expel its contents during both menstruation and labor. This muscle is governed by an ancient technology that predates the central nervous system. Uterine contractions are “spontaneous: it does not require hormonal or nervous input.”³² Once the active phase of labor has started—as I discovered when I went into pre-term labor—there isn't much that anyone can do to stop its progress. This is what the “active” in *active labor* means: precisely inverting our habitual intuition that associates active with self-control, the controlling *I* is largely *passive* during active labor, relegated to being a passenger along for the ride steered by bodily

knowledge that predates our humanity. Hence, the accuracy of the adage: *You don't do labor. Labor does you.*

"I like physical experiences that involve surrender," Maggie Nelson writes of her son's birth, "I didn't know, however, much about experiences that *demand* surrender—that run you over like a truck, with no safe word to stop it."³³ Surrendering here isn't to any power (not even to the "power of life") but to the very homeostatic forces that constantly animate and maintain and are now distending your body. In that moment of surrendering, the self is not enlarged through this implacable demand—which doesn't ask for your consent and doesn't give a damn about your subjectivity—but is instead annihilated as the *it must* collides with the *I cannot*.

But even in the shattering intensity of giving birth without pharmaceutical pain relief, annihilation is not the same as obliteration. In Leder's account of digestion, the respective sites of the *I can* and *I cannot* / *it can*, physiologically distinguished by different muscle structure, are almost mutually exclusive: the swallowed apple disappears from both my control and my conscious awareness (unless it gives me indigestion) and its progress through my bodily terrain requires no participation from me until it's about to exit. By contrast, the *I cannot* of labor, especially prior to the blessed efficacy of modern painkillers, bursts into consciousness awareness, nailing the mind to the body. To survive labor without analgesics (for even in my fancy hospital, there is a point at which it is too late to ask for an epidural, no way out of the pain but through it) the conscious *I* encounters the terrible intimacy of being compelled to obey internal dictations. At the threshold where the magical sway I wield over my own body definitively ends, something akin to mysticism becomes possible in the visceral depths that I habitually avoid at all costs. There are forms of intelligence nestled within obedience that you cannot know until you arrive: *how* you show up when you have no choice but to show up still matters. You can try to flee the body precisely when flight is futile—and thus encounter the limitation of your will as a nihilism that no amount of retroactive self-empowerment can truly dispel or redeem. Although the narratives we tell ourselves afterwards often weave the illusion of ownership over the visceral experience of dispossession, you cannot own yourself through this experience, no more than you can own yourself through dying. But in learning to cooperate with the implacable bodily compulsions you cannot control, you might experience the dissipation of the abstraction of power into the impersonality of force: external to your will yet internal insofar as it originates from none other than your body. Cooperation requires accurate reading and the bodily intelligence of timing: when you feel the wave coming, bear down to push with each contraction as it ripples through you. Sensed in its minute particularity, the most intense pain I have ever experienced becomes a prompt for intelligent action: push, here, now.

When the instructor who led my birth class told us that she *mooed like a cow* during her labor and delivery, I took it as a sign I'm in the wrong place. The only reason I ended up in the natural birth class is because, since twins often arrive early, this was the only class sequence that's likely to finish before I deliver. But spare me the essential oils and singing bowls and gimme the real drugs, the kind that involve a needle. I want the state-of-the-art technology and a pedigreed, highly competent, even slightly paranoid medical team hovering over me, doing what they need to and telling me what to do.

Low sounds, a gloved hand on my cheek redirects my screams. *Keep it low*. For this second delivery, we had arrived at the hospital too late for the epidural that I kept requesting, so we'll need to make do with the old-fashioned methods. I experiment with the effect of pairing various consonants with ooohs and uummm, I stumble across the m's: *moooooh*. It works. Not by imagining myself as a cow, but by letting the vibration in my throat and abdomen ferry the pain across my body.

If you can relinquish the sadomasochist myth that pain is divine punishment for indulging desires, there's a grace hidden in the peculiar pain of childbirth. The fetus and the apparatus that your body built to nourish it are obviously the cause of your pain, but they cannot be the culprit. This pain signifies nothing, yet its presence isn't nihilistic but rather immanently useful, each wave a contraction laboring to move one body out through another. What makes the intensity bearable is the truth that becomes knowledge only when it is visceral: there is no perpetrator and hence no victim, no one to blame for the situation and nothing to redeem. Causation and the narrative arcs it inspires peel away until there are only two bodies laboring to survive the vital contact and partition of the other.

*

If the physiological drama of birth is undeniably an extraordinary event, it nonetheless marks only the most intense, undeniable version of an everyday mysticism vital to meeting our basic needs: a body that knows and acts by following internal dictations in the small moments that exceed our self-possession. This *I cannot* is an everyday occurrence, in the little moments that snag the *I*'s illusion of seamless self-control. Halfway through a hot yoga class, dizziness swarms my consciousness as I stand up too quickly after being upside-down. For a moment that feels much longer to me than it does to the other bodies in the room, I am literally disoriented as my visual field and the instructor's voice go blurry. I cannot tell which way is up and cannot move without falling. But my feet are still planted, so I settle my attention in my heels and wait for my body to adjust. Once the lightheadedness passes, I continue onward. But what just occurred as I dwelled in that visceral *I cannot*, waiting for my body to guide my actions, to make acting possible in the first place?

Progressing into the recessive body, the distinction that Leder draws between our mostly volitional experience of bodily surface and our largely non-volitional experience of the visceral depths might help to illuminate the curious anatomy of Blake's use of *genius*. In his early work, *All Religions are One*, Blake insists that "the Poetic Genius is the true Man. and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius."³⁴ Recognizing the internal work of the "poetic genius" is the first principle of what Blake calls "the true method of knowledge," a method that he offers as a forgotten alternative to the rational, discursive form we associate with the word *thinking*.³⁵ Residing in the viscera—the internal sphere literally governed an independent nervous system—genius thickens our relationship to our own bodies by extending that relation to the involuntary spaces beyond our sense of control. We relate to genius, Blake insists, by heeding its dictations and "[h]onouring his gifts in other men, each according to his genius."³⁶ For Blake, the spontaneity often attributed to genius marks its indifference to our self-control: "genius finds thought without seekg & thought thus, producd finds sense."³⁷ Even the precisely placed and sharply delineated thoughts that guide Blake's poetic production are not produced by the thinking mind as an exercise of its volition, but rather discovered through an internal encounter with the genius (which he sometimes calls "spirit" or "demon") which *dictates* our actions. For genius, Blake insists, does not transcend embodiment but instead resides *inside* bodily depths, as the visceral sensations "give themselves to their Energetic genius" that occur beneath and beyond our "surface" experience of self-control.³⁸

"If we did not abandon ourselves to Genius," philosopher Giorgio Agamben observes in a remarkably similar vein, "if we were only ego and consciousness, we would not even be able to urinate."³⁹ The embodied, unpretentious genius that Agamben invokes playfully and profoundly reprimands the Romantic Cult of Genius—still lingering in our current usage of the word as a synonym for an exceptional mind excepted from the normal rules—that imagines it as transcendent force or uncompromising vision, a deified ego soaring above the clouds, set apart from the uncomprehending masses. We've all been looking in the wrong direction.⁴⁰ In uncanny resonance with Blake's descriptions of embodied inspiration at work in his breath, blood, nervous and digestive systems—all locations of visceral interoception—Agamben suggests that genius lies beneath

personhood, distinct from the ego, hidden *within* the most quotidian bodily functions rather than transcending them:

It has been said that spirituality is above all an awareness that the individual being is not completely individuated, but still contains a nonindividuated share of reality, which must be not only preserved but also respected and, in a way, even honored, as one honors one's debts. But Genius is not merely spirituality and is not just concerned with the things we customarily regard as higher and more noble. Everything in us that is impersonal is genial. The force that pushes the blood through our veins or that plunges us into sleep, the unknown power in our body that gently regulates and distributes its warmth, or that relaxes and contracts the fibers of our muscles—that too is genial. It is Genius that we obscurely sense in the intimacy of our physiological life, in which what is most one's own is also strange and impersonal, and in which what is nearest somehow remains distant and escapes mastery. Living with Genius means, in this sense, living in the intimacy of a strange being, remaining constantly in relation to a zone of nonconsciousness. But this zone of nonconsciousness is not repression; it does not shift or displace an experience from conscious to the unconscious, where this experience would be sedimented as a troubling past, waiting to resurface in symptoms and neuroses. This intimacy with a zone of nonconsciousness is an everyday mystical practice, in which the ego, in a sort of special, joyous esotericism, looks on with a smile at its own undoing and, whether it's a matter of digesting food or illuminating the mind, testifies incredulously to its own incessant dissolution and disappearance. *Genius* is our life insofar as it does not belong to us.⁴¹

If for Freud, the psyche is constituted by a disembodied conscious component that shades indiscernibly into the unconscious, Agamben's sense of genius extends the topography of that disembodied interiority to include the visceral experience of the internal body: "living with genius means living in the intimacy of a strange being, remaining constantly in relation to a zone of nonconsciousness."⁴² Despite the awkward negative prefix, "nonconsciousness" here is not the binary opposite of conscious awareness: instead, it offers an antonym to obliviousness (or, to use Blake's term, opakeness). In this sense, we might use "[t]his intimacy with a zone of nonconsciousness" that Agamben calls "genius" as a groping pathway out of the paradox of knowledge that Sapir's essay poses when he describes intuition as a form of knowing ("*in a sense it is well known to him*") while lauding the necessity of maintaining "a healthy unconsciousness" to our intuitions such that "it never dare be fully known in the conduct of daily life." For Edward Sapir, one cannot both know—which means "complete analysis and conscious control," "understand[ing] in "explicit terms"—and act fluidly and fluently at the same time; like Nietzsche, Sapir assumes that knowledge inevitably levitates the self out of the embodied immersion in a cultural milieu in which one unconsciously (and thus intuitively) acts.⁴³ But in this "zone of nonconsciousness" that Agamben characterizes as genius, the visceral depths of the body contain its own *form* of knowledge, which cannot be readily translated into cognitive content that Sapir (and Freud, and so many others) narrowly demarcates as knowing. Knowing, here, is intuitive in Sapir's sense of "a delicately nuanced feeling of subtle relations, both perceived and possible"; it dictates bodily action before cognition, including many actions that never arise above the threshold of cognitive awareness.⁴⁴ As an embodied awareness of an internal space illegible within the Cartesian mind/body paradigm, this "zone of nonconsciousness" only becomes inhabitable as consciousness learns how to cultivate a relationship with bodily sensations that sidestep both discursive thought and self-possession: *Genius is our life insofar as it does not belong to us.*⁴⁵ In the physiological intimacy of living with genius, the binary

distinction between self-possession and being possessed dissipates, as the self follows the embodied dictates that we cannot possess but must "abandon ourselves to."

Such abandonment is not only difficult, but, for many thinkers, also undesirable because it undermines what Western philosophy has long determined to be the proper trajectory of human maturation. For Freud, the ego "serves as a kind of facade" for the "unconscious mental entity we have designated as the id," and the therapeutic task of psychoanalysis, encapsulated in Freud's famous maxim "where id was, there ego shall be," is to strengthen the conscious ego to replace its unconscious doppelgänger.⁴⁶ In this context, Agamben's description of the "intimacy" between ego and genius offer an alternative configuration to either the unconscious hostility by which the ego is unwittingly controlled by the id or the restoration of id's current territory to rightful mastery of the ego. During what Agamben calls "an everyday mystical practice," the ego "looks on with a smile at its own undoing and, whether it's a matter of digesting food or illuminating the mind, testifies incredulously to its own incessant dissolution and disappearance."⁴⁷ Here, in the depths of the body, what undoes the ego isn't injury or sickness or even pain, but simply *inner observation* of the involuntary body at work, either metabolically maintaining what Damasio calls the "housekeeping of the body", or that incomprehensible moment when comprehension sinks in (into where? the body, of course). In this sense, the dissolution of the ego is triggered by nothing more or less than touching internally upon the body's materiality, recognizing the profound limitations of our claim to self-possession as our body carries on with its incessant activity beyond and beneath our conscious control.

Agamben does not tarry in that state of ego dissolution for long. Inhabiting the involuntary body is an exotic and temporary displacement of the self rather than our native habitat: in this sense, even Agamben's description of genius quietly affirms the irredeemable reality of Lacan's "vital dehiscence." For all that his essay tenderly domesticates mysticism by sinking it into the viscera, its epigram—Prospero's confession as he releases his magical sidekick, Ariel, "now my charms are all o'erthrown, and what strength I have's mine own"—already hints at the inevitability of disenchantment that structures its vision of the human. "For each person, there comes a time when he must be separated from his Genius," Agamben writes "[n]o doubt life without Ariel loses its mystery, and yet somehow we know that now it can really belong to us; only now do we begin to live a purely human and earthly life."⁴⁸ Knowing in this context consists of taking up the selfhood that you had set aside in observing the body at *its* work; self-possession becomes, at the end, the inevitable marker of the human. As the essay turns away from Genius ("only the departure is real") in its final paragraph to reclaim what "really belongs to us," perhaps what it abandons in affirming a "purely human" life isn't some transcendent mystery but the material, permeable, and incessantly changing, extended embodiment that we share with all sentient "earthly life."⁴⁹ It is a lonely purity.

Genius, for Agamben is inevitably childlike: like Nietzsche's "man of intuition" who cannot learn, this "presence within us" is "forever immature, infinitely adolescent, and hesitant to cross the threshold of any individuation." Thus, as we inevitably age, "what changes is not Genius but our relationship to him, turning from luminous and clear to shadowy and opaque."⁵⁰ In this sense, the zone of nonconscious in which we intimately relate to Genius remains the negation of growth or maturity, a romantic innocence that can only be eroded by experience. Yet Ariel, whom Prospero and Agamben banish in the name of true self-sovereignty, hints at a vision of change and growth that eschews individuation, a form of maturation that continuously erodes rather than eventually abandons us to self-possession. What form of knowing can transform with the body's porousness, that stays submerged below the waterline of individual identity to *suffer a sea-change, into something rich and strange*? If there is a parting between genius and ego at the end of our conscious existence—or a prophetic moment when you "touch death" and realize, as Maggie Nelson did during her son's birth, that "death will do you too, without fail and without mercy"—perhaps the task is learning how to

relinquish ego to inhabit genius.⁵¹ Or as D. W. Winnicott puts it in the form of a prayer: *May I be alive when I die*, a presence which coincides with conscious awareness of the visceral materiality of one's life, to become pulsation in the artery even as it fades.⁵²

the space of composition

My children are my books, a colleague tells me. I sense the thought that neither of us speaks out loud: time and energy are limited resources, so it must be one or the other. The rearing of children will inevitably disrupt the writing of books, even if his wife does most of the childcare.

For *here's the catch: I cannot hold my baby at the same time as I write*. Maggie Nelson is speaking back to philosopher Peter Sloterdijk—whose opus *Bubbles* includes a “reverse gynecology” that rethinks existence starting from uterine life. One can agree with the thought but feel stymied by the process of producing philosophical thoughts. I take her point—all these male thinkers with all that time on their hands to ponder and publish about what our bodies do while our hands are occupied doing it. I too ache for more child-free writing time—especially in those moments when I'm brimming with inklings of where the writing will go next, but there is a sick baby to nurse, so the composition will have to wait. (Oh, to be an octopus, eight limbs that could operate independently from its own “brain”!)

But composition isn't just writing. In actual practice—when it's just you and your coffee mug and your laptop with deadlines to meet—it mostly *isn't* writing, but the rumblings of thought in between the moments when your fingers strike the keypad, shaped by the discipline of sidestepping the poorly formed ones. *My stories are here*, my grandfather used to say, pointing to the red, raised mole on his potbelly. Composition is held within the body in the most literal sense, your belly simmering with sensations that are localizable yet inchoate and ephemeral, which add up the visceral pressure that indeed can make you feel ill.⁵³ (It mostly makes me feel nauseous and bloated—my writing pants are stretchy and have an elastic waist.) But the task at hand is not to *describe* these sensations (such direct self-expression would make for a very boring essay or poem) but to settle into them, letting them guide you. So much of thinking is feeling your way into the visceral spaces of thought. Honing the precision of that feeling takes practice and cultivation; we produce reams of bad writing just to arrive at the simplicity and profoundness of knowing what it feels like when you are ready to write. To know when and how to call so the words can come.

You can write a dissertation chapter in a week if you really need to, a friend tells me. This is indeed the stuff of grad school lore, but it also happens too often to be dismissed as some mystical beast. (I hope it's true because I have three months to write three chapters.) My friend who—when Harvard asked for her nonexistent last chapter leading up to a job interview—locked herself in a room and wrote it in a week. She doesn't “believe” in the spirits in any modern sense, but they still came when she called. For all that we scholars often reject the claims of inspiration as self-aggrandizement, we still teach its forms and impress its rhythm upon our own students each time we tell them to *feel out where the thought is going*. *Go with the idea that arises from the process, not the one on your pre-formed outline*. We teach as practice the truths that we cannot explain.

In the minute particularities of practice, composition is mostly passive, which is why the well-wrought line can still strike the thinking self with surprise even as it flows from your fingertips. Its operations can be mildly disruptive (*where is Mama going?* my toddler wails as I run to my notebook to capture the sense of thought before it dissipates from my body). But when we do not (or cannot) segregate it from daily life, composition seeps in to find its form through the cracks and lull of tending to quotidian rhythms. The sentence I couldn't figure out while laboring over my laptop as the babysitting minutes tick away finally comes to me, landing in my chest while I'm changing a diaper. That moment that Satan's watchfiends cannot find is not hidden from everyday

busyness, but *within* the everyday, in the bodily ease that steals in on tiptoes when the pressure to produce ceases: *Damn. braces. Bless relaxes.*⁵⁴

For most Romantic-era writers, the genius commands a private sphere of exclusive attention, like a jealous God or immature lover who rejects all other forms of worship as idolatry. Coleridge blames the unfinished status of *Kubla Khan* on a "person on business from Porlock" who interrupted the reception of his sacred dream vision. (Coleridge had *one* inconsiderate visitor for an hour—I live with three of them!) But I know the feel of that interruption: the stumble that breaks my stride. It's the feeling that I guard against when I click the lock on the bedroom door to ward off little ones whom, of course, are magnetically drawn to any locked door. Most scholars wouldn't voice aloud the violence in Jonathon Lowes Livingston's verdict—if *there is any man in the history of literature who should be hang, drawn, and quartered, it is the person on business from Porlock*—but we still feel his irritation whenever we're blocked from following our inspiration by the mundanities of "business." But why? Blaming the interruption for dispelling the elusive dream only reifies this Romantic myth until it becomes all too real for us: inspiration is a brittle space, a one-time offer that you lose if you snooze or sneeze or entertain untimely visitors. Or heaven forbid, have children. (Maybe that's why Rousseau abandoned all his in orphanages.)

But beyond the training wheels of the sacred seclusion we offer novice writers because they usually need it, what makes composition possible is not the outline guarding a pristine space—always false in its insularity—in which one knows that one will not be interrupted, but the porousness of spaciousness in which interruptions can recur without killing the vibe. The muse may indeed be fickle to the men that desire to possess her by being possessed by her, but she too is a mother and she understands necessity tenderly. *Labour well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little-Ones*: you can trust the work to return to you when you are ready.⁵⁵ Your body will hold the words that your mind has forgotten. Let the rhythm of writing sync with the rhythm of your biological life: not a seamless flow of transcendent thoughts streaming in from who-knows-where, but the beat and the pause of a heart-beat, the interruptions that sustain coordination. *Im/-pulse / -pulse.*

spirit possession

"I can call the spirits from the vasty deep," boasts Glendower, the rebel-magician in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV*.⁵⁶ But the line that resonates with modernity is Hotspur's witty rejoinder: "Why, so can I, or so can any man; but will they come when you do call for them?" Glendower is too egomaniacal to come up with an apt response; Hotspur readily calls his bluff on his offer to teach him "how to command the devil." Besides, in this play, it isn't spirits or the devil that either man needs as much as other men willing to gather and fight under his banner. But one might ask of Hotspur: Can you recognize the spirits that come unbidden? The ones that arise not from some extra-terrestrial realm, but from the vasty deep of your own bodily impulses?

As a cursory glance at the mechanics of any fantasy video game might reveal, our culture thinks of summoning as exerting control over bodies—specifically, other people's bodies. Summoning for help: the call to bring another body to supplement the limitations of your own. Court summons: the authoritative command to appear at a specific place *or else*. Grammatically and pragmatically, summoning implies an almost telekinetic possession over another body that often resist or wants to resist the call. (One might call that relationship ideology; for Louis Althusser, our bodily jolt to an appellation—*hey you!*—is what makes the speaker a figure of authority for us.) We moderns no longer believe in these creaky, superstitious tales of summoning spirits (were the magicians all faking it? or self-deceived?). But our fears and desires have certainly taught us to

believe in the summons of power—and we believe it so profoundly that power has become the only form of summoning we recognize.

William Butler Yeats wanted to summon inspiration as one would summon power—and he was convinced that Blake knew the trick:

Grant me an old man's frenzy,
Myself I must remake
As Timon or as Lear
Or that William Blake
Who beat upon the wall
Until truth answer his call.⁵⁷

Writing towards the end of his life, when the magical sway one habitually exerts over one's body has gone slack with time, the body Yeats seeks to control is his own, estranged from the summoning *I* by its frailty "now that strength of body goes." What he wants from Blake is occult knowledge: how do you make a call so compelling that even truth comes to heel? Yeats seeks the power to construct his own reality, even if that reality is inhabitable only through frenzy: an intensification of embodiment to elevate the self out of its material limitations, the imagination made real through the vivacity of its ideas that cleaves the "old man's eagle mind" from his decrepit body. For all that Yeats's speaker tries to get out of himself and to recast himself as other characters, the frenzy he desires functions as a form of self-possession. (In this sense, Yeats is a quintessential disenchanted modern seeker trying to re-enchant himself.) His invocation yearns to seize the power invoked to remake the self anew—at least for the duration that frenzy can be made to last. His summons both depend upon and widen the cleavages they seek to heal: between body and mind, self and other, the internal and the external world.

Yet if Blake does not come when Yeats calls for him (by the next stanza, Yeats has already moved on to another muse: "Michel Angelo"), perhaps it is because Yeats has not yet figured out how Blakean summoning works. Although Yeats desperately wants to be a believer and Hotspur is an avowed skeptic, for both, a summoning is only successful when the object called upon apparates in the room (where?) to substantiate the summoner's mastery and prosthetically incorporate other bodies under the summoner's personal telekinetic power.

Blake, however, issues his summons not to command what he calls, but to offer his body to the other's directives—and he calls upon spirits that are already present in the body although insensible to his present consciousness. He opens his poem, *Milton*, by invoking the muses that inspired John Milton to inhabit the parts of his own body most vigorously engaged in the act of composition:

...Come into my band
By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm
From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. Planted his paradise.⁵⁸

In one sense, Blake's challenging claim that his work is divinely inspired is not that uncommon: ascribing creation to a higher authority can also be a strategic practice of claiming prestige (*God wrote it, not me!*). Some scholars have suggested that since there is no evidence Blake wrote "from dictation"—what evidence would they have deemed convincing?—his claim of inspiration belongs to a long-running marketing scheme. Yet if Blake had intended to upsell his works by rebranding them with the logo of divine presence, he must have been a terrible salesman. For the powers he describes do not illuminate his mind (as any potential audience of Milton enthusiasts might expect),

but rather descend into his brain and body—the material antithesis to the disembodied space where, in the Western tradition, divine illumination happens.

This shift in location from the “superior interior” to the “inferior interior” has profound implications for self-mastery; for unlike the mind, which can booster the illusion of self-mastery indefinitely, the internal body is presided over by the automatic nervous system. In this space which, as Leder writes, “always recedes to some degree from personal will,” our habitual sense of mastery over our muscular-skeletal systems becomes irrelevant as we bring attention to dwell in the visceral space governed by the “mild powers” of “Nerves” and “Brain” that constitute and regulate our interoception system. In this sense, Blake’s invocation inverts the telekinetic sense of power that Yeats attributes to him (and desires to channel through him). But this inversion is not a reversal of subject and object that transforms the self into the pawn of some external force (some other magician or marketing agency summoning *you*). Rather, for Blake, summoning the muses is a preparation for an estranging dive into the “vasty deep” that habitually operates beyond our conscious control and, without cultivation, readily slips beneath our threshold of awareness. This is the subtle and inward sense of summoning we still invoke when we “summon up courage”: an internal gathering is too nuanced and complex to be accurately named control. Despite the vacuous recommendations to pump yourself up with positive self-talk, courage does not readily respond to an act of will. Nor is it very susceptible to self-persuasion: it arrives unbidden only when you reach that space within yourself, which requires a different but real journey each time. Although some dictionaries still catalogue “summon up courage” as an example of a “reference to abstract things,” courage isn’t abstract if you’re actually paying attention to your body. You can feel the shift in bodily experience when it arrives. And you can certainly feel its absence: the weakness in your limbs, the heaviness and hesitation, the disorientation that Blake calls *nervous fear*.

The agitation and anxiety that attend the preparation for poetic inspiration does not readily fit the “anxiety of influence” paradigm by which one tries to overcome anxiety by casting off the influences of others to launch oneself independently.⁵⁹ Although we habitually think of fear in relation to an object (fear *of* spiders or fear *for* your reckless toddler), Blake’s nervous fear (which he sometimes marks as “unease” or “uneasy” in his marginalia)⁶⁰ does not peg it to an external trigger, but instead emphasizes its bodily location in the nervous system itself. This attribution is not self-recrimination but rather opens up possibilities beyond the narrow limits of our habitual awareness. For Blake, the visceral tension that he so keenly feels becomes the bodily aperture for the invocation to realize itself in him, to “plant his ministry” through the “portals of my Brain.” Without ever exiting the room, Blake enters the space of inspiration by letting his consciousness sink beneath the “magical sway” of self-control, where the subject disappears into the “dense matter of the body itself.”⁶¹

If there is any beating upon the wall in Blake’s *Milton*, it is not the mighty strike that showcases muscular strength, but an internal rhythm so minute and insignificant that we habitually overlook its presence: the subtle, sustained, and shifting rhythm of the heartbeat pulsing against the artery walls, our attentiveness to which Blake locates the *spiritual* act of inspiration. What may appear to be a contradiction in terms (how is feeling your heartbeat a spiritual rather than a mundane or material act?) is itself the result of our fundamental misunderstanding of what we mean by “spirit”—a misunderstanding long perpetuated by a culture that that turned “Spirit” into “the ghost of matter or nature” and that makes (as Blake writes of John Milton) “the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!”⁶² If Blake’s critique of “All Bibles or sacred codes” in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is their dualistic segregation of body from soul and their consequent denigration of the body, his later works lambast Enlightenment thinkers for deepening that schism from the other side, by eviscerating spirit into “non-entity.”⁶³ On the cusp of the secularism that arrives in full force by the nineteenth century, spirit comes to mark the absence of matter (“Vacuum!”), and the word itself increasingly fails to

make sense as humans discover the vast and intricate range of the material, natural world that abhors a vacuum.

When Blake offers his own description of spirit, he focuses on uprooting our assumption of the antithesis between the supposedly transcendental spirit and the material body: "A Spirit or Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated."⁶⁴ Sleep and digestion are "conducted by spirits" because Blake's embodied sense of spirit marks the precision of visceral sensations that dictate specific bodily acts.⁶⁵ To read or write "in spirit" (which he recommends to the reader that seeks to understand his works) entails learning to feel and follow the dictations of subtle bodily signals arising from engagement with his works.⁶⁶ Yet Blake also insists that beyond the immanence of infancy, our interoceptive sensitivity and sensibility cannot be taken for grant. Heeding bodily dictations requires an education ("improvement of sensual enjoyment") for opakeness is not only our current starting point, but in Western culture further assumed to be the only tolerable configuration of mind and body.⁶⁷ Our opakeness cannot be illuminated by exiling unpleasant bodily sensations in hopes of achieving angelic serenity ("the enjoyments of Genius," Blake reminds us, "to Angels look like torment and insanity"), but rather by *cultivating* the acuteness and accuracy of our responsiveness to increasingly subtle feelings.⁶⁸

Blake is ruthlessly candid about the most challenging implication of recognizing the spirits at work in our bodies. His insistence that "we who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by spirits" confronts the reader with the loss of self-possession—and the version of agency that depends upon maintaining telekinetic control over the body—that inevitably occurs as the mind learns to inhabit the body and begins to sense the minute particularities of its own internal workings. In a chapter of *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain* aptly entitled "There's someone in my head, but it's not me," neuroscientist David Eagleton points out that Blake is not unique in receiving dictations, paradigm-shifting ideas that "simply came to him."⁶⁹ What *is* astonishing—and what Blake's staunch language of *dictations* emphasizes—is how keenly he perceives *that* he receives them, rather than crediting himself as the exclusive copyright holder of his ideas. He notices what occurs at the edges of consciousness—the precipice from which the rest of us inch away, where the subject freefalls into material processes beyond its control. This is why invoking the spirits that already reside in the body requires courage—and why Nietzsche, Kant, Freud, and almost all Western thinkers whose paradigm of self is built upon a foundation of self-mastery avert their gaze from the visceral body which they correctly insist is detrimental to selfhood. But if summoning up courage suggests that the energies are directed towards an intentional activity, the scene that Blake calls us to enter in Milton is eerie: to observe the sleeping self—that is, the self in a state in which “volitional” activities are suspended and animation governed by forces beyond our control.

In *Milton*, Blake depicts the beginning of Milton's journey towards poetic inspiration as a literal act of clairvoyant sleepwalking:

As when a man dreams, he reflects not that his body sleeps,
Else he would wake; so seem'd he entering his Shadow: but
With him the Spirits of the Seven Angels of the Presence
Entering; they gave him still perceptions of his Sleeping Body;
Which now arose and walk'd with them in Eden, as an Eighth
Image Divine tho' darken'd; and tho walking as one walks
In sleep; and the Seven comforted and supported him.⁷⁰

The problem with dreaming, Blake observes, isn't the illusory nature of the dream-content that Descartes found so unbearable, but rather that the dreamer cannot recognize the true state of his slumbering body without disturbing its rest. Blake's Milton overcomes this paradox not through his

own will but via the gift bestowed upon him by the "Spirits of the Seven Angels of the Presence": the ability to be present to the "still perceptions of his Sleeping Body."⁷¹ Milton, Steven Goldsmith notes of this scene, "finds himself aware of somatic functions ordinarily opaque to consciousness, and thus he observes the mobilization of a body that can run (or at least walk) on its own, with a soft agency independent of his intellect or wit."⁷² But if his body is sleepwalking, in what sense is Milton's experience a "still perception"? Goldsmith's reading of this scene offers a hint when he notes, "the experience is not alarming."⁷³ The divine gift is not just the perceptive vision to peek into what is "ordinarily opaque to consciousness" (an MRI can do that nowadays), but to *inhabit* this slumbering body without the alarm that would rouse it from slumber. The gift of presence ("Bless relaxes") undoes our habitual association of consciousness and control to allow the observer to consciously go along for the ride as one's bodily functions are dictated by the automatic nervous system, carrying itself along without the consent or control of the conscious self.⁷⁴ For Goldsmith, "in this strange, difficult scene, Milton's moving, somatic body does not undermine agency so much as expands its range of possibility, by confusing the very opposition between sleep and effort, rest and motion, motor force and the relaxation of the will."⁷⁵ Agency here isn't so much expanded or confused but rather recalibrated: disaggregated from our habitual association with self-possession and self-determination and instead restored to what Goldsmith so aptly describes as the "soft agency independent of his intellect or will," or what Blake calls "mild power" and associates with infancy.⁷⁶ We all inhabited this mildness once: the form of agency that moves sleepwalking Milton is the softness of the neonatal human body, whose lack of volitional muscular-skeletal control (the prematurity Lacan laments of our species) belies the astonishing intelligence and plasticity of its body-brain, which wires itself to its intimate environment to slowly and continuously construct both the features of the humanity that we recognize and the inhuman agency constantly operating beneath our habitual awareness.

Although Arendt uses sleepwalking as a metaphor to bemoan the failure of proper, rational thinking ("unthinking men are like sleepwalkers")⁷⁷, the non-volitional agency that operates most undeniably as we sleep offers a more accurate account of how agency functions than the restive, volitional activity that we take as the human norm. The conscious experience of his sleepwalking body exposes Milton, and Blake's attentive readers, to the disorientating realization that the free agency of the self is propped up by what neuroscientists call the "*illusion* of free will"—or in Blake's phrase once again, "we who dwell on earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep."⁷⁸ For although digestion and sleep have the advantage of being uncontestably involuntary activities ("Though I can lift my arm without any problem, I cannot in the same way choose to secrete a little more bile or accelerate my digestion,"⁷⁹ Leder observes), twenty-first century neuroscientists would remind us that even acts we consider volitional are something of a misnomer. "Your brain uses prediction to initiate your body's movements," Barrett writes, "these predictions appear even before you have any conscious awareness or intent about moving your body."⁸⁰ *Thinking*—to use the word to encompass the fuller range of neurological activity that includes conscious and mostly unconscious operations—is not a rational exercise of self-mastery over the needy body, but rather the constant homeostatic activity through which the brain regulates metabolic resources by *predicting* bodily needs before they arise--and in the process generates (to varying degrees of hallucination) our experience of reality in accordance with its predictions.

Blake's insistence on the reality of spirits whose housekeeping acts of conducting digestion and sleep are essential to his own poetic inspiration points to the embodied and intertwined work of interoceptive thinking/feeling/feeding that incessantly operates beneath the current threshold of our dualistic awareness that defines the self in opposition to the body. For Blake, the antonym of the

spirit is not the body, but what he calls "Selfhood." In a complex and climactic moment in *Milton*, his Milton declares:

This is a false Body, an Incrustation over my Immortal
Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated away
To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.⁸¹

The odd term "Incrustation" tethers this passage to material forms and prevents it from levitating into abstraction or morality. A crust is a hardened material form that grows over and hides its own interior: the crust on a bread that protects its soft inside from drying out, or the crust of the earth that we inhabit (we have yet to visit its molten interior). Blake's counterintuitive and precise word choice reminds us that what makes our habitual experience of the body "false" isn't that we're in the wrong body or that we are disembodied souls wrongfully imprisoned in a body, but that we inhabit our bodies too shallowly: we dwell only in the outer crust (where our "magical sway" over the muscular-skeletal system operates) and habitually refuse to inhabit our internal depths (where visceral interoceptive signals reside). The paradigm of selfhood that normalizes, even idealizes, the "opakeness" of its internal body by pathologizing all visceral experiences generates an experience of the selfhood that is real but shallow, that identifies itself with self-possession and thus cannot bear to recognize the work of embodied spirits that slip its control. This selfhood is fragile and deluded because it clings onto the illusion of free will at all costs. Perhaps, then, when Blake invites the spirits to inhabit his writing arm (a part of his muscular-skeletal system whose striated musculature encourages belief in the illusion that we move it at will) he is treating his voluntary body parts as if they were non-volitional, an *as-if* that neuroscientists would remind us is actually an *as-is*. In this sense, Blake, like his character Milton, sidesteps the illusion of free will not by making a mad dash for some ideal of freedom beyond the neuro-network of predictive homeostasis, but by relinquishing the illusion of self-control: he relaxes his volitional sense of control to begin to encounter what arises in its stead.

When Blake insists that "every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause, and Not / A Natural; for a Natural Cause only seems, it is a Delusion / of Ulro: & a ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory" or when he critiques "the reasoning historian, turner and twister of causes and consequences" for failing to recognize "spiritual agency" at work, perhaps he is not anthropomorphically displacing the work of human agency onto super-human forces.⁸² Instead, Blake insists that the naturalness of what we take to be human agency is a veneer that chips off once we begin to inhabit the internal body, that visceral space of bodily activity dictated by spirits whose indifference to our subjectivities nonetheless produces them. Human consciousness is itself the work of brain and bodily forces that operate subtly beneath our illusory sense of self control. The spiritual realm is not located *above* the quotidian sphere of "we who dwell on earth," but beneath the crust of a world that only appears to be a flat plane because we have not investigated further.⁸³ Spiritual agency is located in the unseen and mostly unfelt visceral depths of the body; it is cultivated by learning to receive and heed bodily dictations that neuroscientists term "somatic markers."⁸⁴ But the accuracy and aptness of that reading, as the next section will explore, requires the self-annihilation that Blake incessantly calls for. In a precise inversion of the dualistic sense of spirit as that which transcends materiality, what Blake names *spirit* marks our embodied knowledge of the lacuna in our self-mastery. Recognizing the spirits at work enables the beginning of a long cultivation of re-learning agency, allowing its axis to shift from the telekinetic power of control over bodies into the receptive act of learning to cooperate with the intelligence of the automatic body rather than seeking to hijack its functions. Spirit, for Blake, is matter's keen sensitivity to itself. What do the spirits want from us now?

¹ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996), P2, part III., 71.

² Ibid 72.

³ Ibid 71.

⁴ Ibid 72.

⁵ Kristin Wong, "The Fragility of those Two Pink Lines," *The Atlantic*, March 18, 2022.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2022/03/anxiety-pregnancy-after-miscarriage/627102/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Richard Shusterman, "Thinking through the Body," *Thinking through the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 23-46, 32.

⁸ Shigeshia Kuriyama, "Muscularity and Identity," *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, Cambridge, 1999), 111-151, 144.

⁹ Ibid 116, 8.

¹⁰ Ibid 144.

¹¹ Ibid 144.

¹² Ibid 149. What Kuriyama calls "natural processes" are specifically the non-volitional activities governed by the automatic nervous system, which corollate with the dualistic divide between body and soul: "the life of a person cannot be told [...] merely in terms of natural processes like digestion and the pulsing of the arteries. Beyond processes that happen of themselves, there are also actions willed by the soul and carried out by these instruments called muscles" ("Muscularity and Identity" 145).

¹³ Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1990), 22, 23.

¹⁴ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 48.

¹⁵ For a humanities take on this revolution, see Noga Arikha's "The Interoceptive Turn," *Aeon*, June 17 2019.
<https://aeon.co/essays/the-interoceptive-turn-is-maturing-as-a-rich-science-of-selfhood>

¹⁶ Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 36.

¹⁷ Blake's letter to Thomas Butts. Felpham, August 26 1803, *E* 733.

¹⁸ Ibid, *E* 732.

¹⁹ *Milton* 1, *E* 95.

²⁰ Ancient of Days, frontispiece *Europe: A Prophecy* copy K.
<https://www.blakearchive.org/copy/europe.k?descId=europe.k.illbk.01>

²¹ William Blake. "Newton," *Large Color Printed Drawings* (1795), object 24, Tate Collection.
<https://www.blakearchive.org/copy/cpd?descId=but306.1.cprint.01>

²² *Milton* 10, copy D 1818. <https://www.blakearchive.org/copy/milton.d?descId=milton.d.illbk.10>

²³ *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 4, *E* 34.

²⁴ *Milton* 9, *E* 103.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Milton* 10, *E* 104.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *The [First] Book of Urizen* 23, *E* 81.

²⁹ *E* 516.

³⁰ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 48, 49.

³¹ For more on the depth that correlates with the internal body, see Michael Gershon's description the shifts between the central brain and the enteric nervous system along the digestive tract in *The Second Brain*, pp. 113-115. In this sense, the surface/depth model that describes different experiences within embodiment diverges from the prevailing body/soul model, by which the movement "inward" is also a levitation out of the body. See, for example, Michael Gilmore's *Surface and Depth: the Quest for Legibility in American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) or Richard Shusterman's *Surface and Depth, Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002).

³² S. Wray, S. Kupittayanant, A. Shmygol, R. D. Smith, T. Burdyga. "The Physiological Basis of Uterine Contractility: A Short Review," *Experimental Physiology* 86:2 (March 2001). <https://doi.org/10.1113/eph8602114>

³³ Maggie Nelson. "In the Pain Cavern," *Harper's Magazine*, April 2015, <https://harpers.org/archive/2015/04/in-the-pain-cavern/>

³⁴ *E* 1.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *MHH* 22, *E* 43.

³⁷ *E* 594.

³⁸ In his annotations, Blake admires "Men who give themselves to their Energetic Genius" even when he disagrees with their views. (*E* 614)

³⁹ Giorgio Agamben, "Genius and Ego" *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2007), 9-18, 12.

⁴⁰ Blake's own evocations of genius emphasizes its non-personal, non-human elements. "When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius. lift thy head!"--and yet the eagle embodies genius not by functioning as an emblem of some loftier existence, but because of his heightened animal senses: "how do you know but every Bird that cuts through the airy way / is an immense world of delight, enclosed by your senses five?" (*MHH* 9, *E* 37; *MMH* 7, *E* 35).

⁴¹ *Ibid* 12-13.

⁴² *Ibid* 12.

⁴³ Edward Sapir, "The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society" In E. S. Dummer, ed., *The Unconscious: A Symposium* (New York: Knopf, 1929), 114-142, 122-123.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 123.

⁴⁵ Agamben 13.

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 65.

⁴⁷ Agamben, "Ego and Genius," 13.

⁴⁸ Agamben 18.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid* 16.

⁵¹ Nelson, "In the Pain Cavern."

⁵² Cited in Adam Philips. *Winnicott* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988), 19

⁵³ In a rare scholarly account of inspiration, Timothy Clark notes the "recurrent complaint of writers that composition makes them ill." Timothy Clark. *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997), 32.

⁵⁴ *Milton* 35, *E* 136; *MHH* 9, *E* 37.

⁵⁵ *J* 55, *E* 205.

⁵⁶ *Henry IV* Part 1, ed. Barbara A. Mowat (Washington D.C: Folger Shakespeare Library P, 2002), III.i.1596-1600.

⁵⁷ William Butler Yeats, "An Acre of Grass," *Last Poems and Two Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1940).

⁵⁸ *Milton* 2, *E* 96.

⁵⁹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Blake's annotations to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*, *E* 583-601.

⁶¹ I borrow the phrase "dense matter of the body itself" from Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, 165.

⁶² See Blake's "Annotations to Thornton's 'The Lord's Prayer,'" *E* 669, and *MHH* 6, *E* 35.

⁶³ *MHH* 4, *E* 34; *J* 31, *E* 178, *J* 32, *E* 178; *J* 38-9, *E* 184-6.

⁶⁴ *A Descriptive Catalogue* 38, *E* 541.

⁶⁵ *J* 3, *E* 143

⁶⁶ See Blake's letter to Thomas Butts, April 25, 1803, *E* 728: "but none can know the Spiritual Acts of my three years Slumber on the banks of the Ocean unless he has seen then in the Spirit or unless he should read My long Poem descriptive of these Acts [...] I have written this Poem from immediate Dictation twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines without Premeditation & even against my Will."

⁶⁷ *MHH* 14, *E* 39.

⁶⁸ *MHH* 6, *E* 35. For the "illusion of free will," see Benjamin Libet, "Do We have Free Will?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6, No. 8-9 (1999), 47-57.

⁶⁹ David Eagleman, *The Incognito Brain: The Secret Lives of the Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), 7.

⁷⁰ *Milton* 15, *E* 109.

⁷¹ *Milton* 15, *E* 109. In *The Ever-Lasting Gospel*, Blake refers to the "angel of the divine presence" again as "thou [...] that didst create this body of mine" (*E* 521).

⁷² Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitations*, 237.

⁷³ *Ibid* 237.

⁷⁴ *MHH* 9, *E* 37.

⁷⁵ Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitations*, 237.

⁷⁶ When mildness is not a performance of polite humility, Blake associates it with Jesus's incarnation, such as in these line from "The Lamb" in *Songs of Innocence*:

"He is called by thy name
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child" (*E* 8).

⁷⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (London: Harcourt, 1971), 178.

⁷⁸ *J* 3, *E* 145.

⁷⁹ Leder, *The Absent Body*, 48.

⁸⁰ Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 60.

⁸¹ *Milton* 40, *E* 142.

⁸² *J* 26, *E* 124; "The Catalogue of 1809," *E* 543.

⁸³ *J* 3, *E* 145.

⁸⁴ See Damasio's use of the term in *Descartes's Error: Reason, Emotion, and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 165-222.

*"To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour"*

chapter four: beholding

Blake's relationship to his audience can be distilled into an injunction that recurs endlessly throughout his work: *behold!* Like the biblical texts he knows inside and out, which he splits and reweaves into the fabric of his work, the singular goal of Blake's art and poetry is to conduct his readers' attention to behold—but behold *what* and *how*, exactly? "I will not rest from my great task!" Blake declares in the introduction to his magnum opus, *Jerusalem*, "To open up the Eternal worlds / to open the immortal eyes / of Man."² For it is in the *what* (eternal worlds! immortal eyes!) of beholding that Blake often loses his audience. But if for a moment we might bracket Blake's thunderous claims of *what* he sees and wants us to see, his works attune a reader to recognize, again and again, that *how* seeing operates (even in its most ordinary sense) is already extraordinary if we can pay it sufficient attention. Perhaps, as Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, "[w]e find certain things about vision puzzling because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough."³

the whole business of seeing

Although we commonly associate vision with what Blake calls the "optic nerve" and the apparatus of our two eyeballs, neuroscientists point out that the whole business of seeing is astonishingly vast and interconnected, reaching deep into the brain and body through the nervous and interoceptive systems. Like all forms of sensory-perception, "vision arises not in the eyes but in the brain;" the usual route converts sensory information conducted through the eyeballs and optic nerves into the electric impulses of brain activity.⁴ But exceptions abound, which neuroscientists find especially useful for revising our current intuitions of how sight works.⁵ Even aside from the well-documented examples of blind people who have taught themselves how to use a form of echolocation to produce "visual" information through their ears,⁶ we all experience visions during REM sleep, when the brains (of sighted individuals) generate visual activity neurologically indistinct from the daytime visions that we call seeing. Contrary to our commonsensical assumption that the eyes function as a camera that captures reality, "[t]he brain is properly thought of as a mostly closed system that runs on its own internally generated activity," neuroscientist David Eagleman reminds us, and "the deep secret of the brain" and of the entire interoceptive and nervous systems is that "internal data is not *generated* by external sensory data but merely *modulated* by it."⁷ Hence, "the difference between being awake and being asleep is merely that the data coming in from the eyes *anchors* the perception. Asleep vision is perception that is not anchored to anything in the real world."⁸ (As my partner puts it when I wake up crabby, "I am not responsible for what I did in your dreams!") Whereas nighttime visions are clearly hallucinations that run untethered from "real world" referents, daytime visions are *also* hallucinations constructed by your brain.⁹ The difference is that when one's body and brain are functioning well enough, the latter, according to Lisa Feldman Barrett, is a "carefully controlled hallucination [...] constrained by the world and your body."¹⁰ Or, as Eagleman puts it, "the brain refines its model of the world by paying attention to its mistakes."¹¹ Blake captures the critical difference in his distinction between the "daughters of inspiration" that remain open to continuous adjustment and the "daughters of memory" by which the brain recycles

only what it currently knows in a self-enclosed loop to produce "the ratio of all we have already known. is not the same that it shall be when we know more."¹² Crucially, and aptly conveyed in the name, this ratio-lized seeing under the influence of "daughters of memory" is not limited to dreams (whose untethered state becomes obvious only through the radical adjustment of waking), or mental illness, or brain impairments (which can render the untethered reality of the patient's internal model obvious to everyone else but invisible to the patient herself). Instead, it operates on a continuum which includes what we take to be normal, healthy daytime vision. Blake emphasizes that "man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern;" ratio-lized vision includes all forms of sensory-perception that lack the piercing aperture of attentiveness.¹³ Inspiration, by contrast—and we'll return to this point later—marks a faculty of receptive openness. But herein lies the rub: it's the openness of the inaccessible and incognito *brain*, rather than the self-possessed subject or even the conscious mind.

Literary scholars have long observed Blake's deep and abiding interest in the complexities of perception, but we have largely chalked up that complexity to differences in interpretation (which is, of course, our specialty craft). In the final couplet of "The Everlasting Gospel," for example, we tend to read the distinction between "The Vision of Christ that thou dost see / Is my Visions Greatest Enemy [...] both read the bible day & night / But thou readst black where I read white" as an exegetical argument over what the vision of Christ *means*.¹⁴ But perhaps the poet-artist who claims that children are his best readers might dismiss our interpretative maneuvering as "time lost to converse with you whose works are only Analytics."¹⁵ "Only", Blake suggests, because shifts in perspective at the level of conscious awareness often fail to produce profound changes to our habits and being that Blake considers *real* seeing. "[A]s a man is So he sees."¹⁶ To begin to understand the radical upheaval of Blake's sense of vision, we need to take his dogged and challenging insistence on the literalness of his visions more literally, probing *how* he sees and how he understands the activity of seeing.

In a letter to a disgruntled patron who complained that Blake lacked "Someone to Elucidate [his] Ideas," Blake responds not with an explanation of those ideas, but with a nutshell treatise on vision:

I know 'This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity & by these I shall not regulate my proportions, & Some Scarce see Nature at all But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination & I feel Flatterd when I am told So.¹⁷

"Visions" are real for Blake not because he conflates what appears *only* to his eyes with the external reality loosely shared by others: he knows perfectly well that "not all men see alike" and that his own visions are not visible to others. Rather, he—not unlike twenty-first century neuroscientists in this sense—recognizes that sensory-perception (of which vision has become paradigmatic in the modern age) has never offered transparent access to a stable reality *out there* but produces something much more akin to the dreaming states and is at times literally inseparable from them. This is why to Blake "This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination." What sounded frankly crazy

before the recent Copernican revolution in our paradigms of (neuro)perception might very well be the key that we missed, yet it is perceivable only after we've made the paradigm shift in ourselves. When neuroscientists describe how vision—quotidian, everyday vision alongside every other sensory-perceptive system—operates to a non-specialist audience, they repeatedly emphasize how wildly counter-intuitive the current neuroscientific account is from our commonsense intuitions arising from how consciousness habitually interfaces with the world we live in.¹⁸ But for Blake, who lived centuries before the invention of technologies that neuroscientists now depend on to crack open the "black box" of the brain,¹⁹ this unthinkable *is* the reality he inhabits and describes despite "the aspersion of madness" from his contemporaries: "I see Every thing I paint In This World [...] this world is a World of Imagination & Vision."²⁰

Perhaps it is so difficult to take Blake at his word or to even grasp what he means by *seeing* because in the modern epistemic framework that we still inhabit—though its pillars are now beginning to crumble—any vision tethered to a referent which cannot be corroborated by other viewers is stigmatized as an aberration of the mind or eye's normal functions. Whereas "many cultures regard hallucinations, like dreams, as a special, privileged state of consciousness," neurologist Oliver Sacks writes, "in modern Western culture hallucinations are more often considered to portend madness or something dire happening to the brain—even though the vast majority of hallucinations have no such dark implications."²¹ Yet these sights unseen by others run counter to our deeply engrained expectation that the eye does or should always enable transparent, unmediated access to reality. We commonsensically think of reality *as* that access: it is immediately accessible. But at the fuzzy edges of perceptive experience—whose borders are more expansive than we might imagine—hallucinations untethered to referents are not uncommon.²² Sacks points out, for example, that "involuntary images or quasi-hallucinations appearing just before sleep [...] are estimated to occur in a majority of people, at least occasionally, although they may be so subtle as to go unnoticed."²³ Eagleman observes that "ten percent of people with eye disease and visual loss will experience visual hallucinations," yet "most of them will never mention their hallucinations to their doctors out of fear of being diagnosed with mental illness."²⁴ Hallucinations are simply "unfastened vision," which are easy to spot only when it's bizarre." Indeed, "for all that we know, we hallucinate all the time," that is, even outside the third of our daily lives that pass through wave upon wave of hallucination we call dreaming.²⁵ In a modern culture shaped by an epistemic framework in which what it means to be "not mad" is to present yourself as firmly anchored in a reality verifiable by others, sensory-perceptive experiences—visions, spirits, ghosts, flashes of light in pitch darkness—which do not fit this narrowly co-referential model of reality fall below the threshold of our perceptive attentiveness. We silence ourselves even when we do see it. Why bother noticing if it's not real anyway?

When Eagleman carefully observes that "there is a sense in which all of vision is an illusion," what he has in mind is the complex process by which the brain edits and integrates discrete sensory information to construct the artificially seamless motion pictures our minds experience and casually attach to things out "there" in the world.²⁶ Blake's reminder that "Mental Things are alone Real what is Calld Corporeal Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place" is instructive here: what appears to be *out there* to common sense is instead highly constructed within the black box of the brain, which continuously filters and revises sensory data according to what it predicts we need to see.²⁷ For example, "auditory and visual information are processed at different speeds in the brain; yet the sight of your fingers and the sound of the snap appear simultaneous [...] your brain does quite a bit of fancy editing work to put the signals together in a useful way."²⁸ The handiwork of the best editors is invisible. Similarly, the sophistication of the brain's editing skills only becomes apparent when mistakes are made, such as when the brain-body must make sense of the information streaming in from an environment for which we are not evolutionarily well-adapted. Traveling at high speeds far

above ground, fighter pilots learn to trust their instruments. This is because, Eagleman explains, "your senses will tell you the most inglorious lies, and if you trust them—instead of your cockpit dials—you'll crash."²⁹ Gazing out her cockpit window, the pilot must learn to *see through* the eye as an instrument whose referential capacities reveal to her that what is "out there" must be limited. Without exorcizing her hallucinations or castigating the eye for malfunctioning, the well-trained pilot moves safely through her foreign milieu by abandoning the expectation of referential accuracy—that is, by shedding the paradigm of naive empiricism that governs our commonsense yet inaccurate assumption of how vision works.

Blake insists that the key to perception is learning how to "see thro" the eye and "not with it." But what exactly is the difference? One iteration of that phrase that occurs in *The Everlasting Gospel* offers a glimpse of the complex activity of seeing "thro:"

This Lifes dim Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see not thro the Eye
That was born in a night to perish in a night
When the Soul slept in the beams of Light.³⁰

Although often interpreted as an airy depiction of transcendent souls, perhaps this passage functions more aptly as an uncannily precise description of how vision operates, both in its nighttime mode of producing dreams unanchored from referents ("that was born in a night to perish in a night") and its daytime operations by which our visual hallucinations are modulated by incoming "beams of Light." Not unlike the fighter pilot's keen awareness of the normalcy of non-congruity between what's "out there" and the outside world that appears to her eyes, Blake insists that in both versions what we see is distorted—and not just by ideology or the prosthetic lens of the microscope and telescope whose peculiar distorting effects he explores elsewhere—but by the natural apparatus of the eye itself. In this sense, to "see thro" the eye is akin to lucid dreaming, a practice of continuing to use the eye without expecting vision to provide the transparent or complete picture of reality falsely promised by our deeply engrained paradigms of naturalism. For if all seeing—waking, dreaming, and other states of visual brain activity—are indeed and inevitably degrees of hallucination, as the neuroscientists insist, Blake's advice to *see thro* the hallucinations is a practical reminder that there is no point in trying to expel them to reach some unmediated Real or arguing with others about the accuracy of our respective hallucinations. Rather, the task at hand is to let this keen insight—the eye's inability to fulfill impossible expectations—enable us to work more deftly with whatever we do see.³¹

Blake reiterates this advice to see "thro" the eye in one of his most cryptic writings. His notes to "A Vision of the Last Judgment"—part description of a lost artwork, part meandering treatise on vision—ends with a definitive, defiant, even dismissive creed of *how* he sees: "I assert for My self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me. [...] I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it."³² Although his rejection of "Outward Creation" is often read as a solipsistic retreat into his own interiority, Blake's keen awareness of the hidden *internal* processes of vision deep inside the body and brain might nudge us towards a different understanding of the relationship between the inner and outer worlds. Perhaps Blake's refusal to behold "Outward Creation" is not an escapist attempt to shut his eyes to the world and privately commune with God in the sacrosanct chamber of his soul. Perhaps after all it rejects the naively empiricist futility of trying to clear your vision by rubbing your eyes, as if the

eyes function like a dirty window or blurry pair of glasses that we can defog with a hanky. Our attempts to improve vision by cleaning the smudges from our ocular lens do not usually work because the lens that we think we see *with* is the wrong paradigm—illusory in its incompleteness, misleading in its very emphasis on transparency—for understanding the dimness of the "Windows of the Soul."

"Depends on the Organ that Beholds it"

Thus far I've intimated that Blake's counterintuitive yet prophetic observations of how vision works make him a proto-neuroscientist. Yet it's precisely on this point—that is, *how* to observe and improve our perceptive faculties (or as Blake puts it, how to cultivate our understanding—that his *modus operandi* parts ways with those of many twenty-first century neuroscientists.³³ According to most neuroscientists, the only way we can peer deeply into the black box of the brain is through the tools and technologies of their very own discipline (or for uninitiated laymen like myself, by trusting the field reports arriving from the rapidly expanding scientific frontiers). Eagleman, for example, writes that although self-knowledge of the "inner cosmos" requires work from both "the outside (in the form of science)" and "from the inside (introspection)," he also insists that twenty-first century science—equipped with advanced imaging technology that can now offer a granular glimpse of the living body's neurological workings—has the obvious advantage.³⁴ But despite the impressive access and mind-boggling information afforded by increasingly powerful scientific tools, something hasn't quite landed in the bodies and brains that must make sense of the strange new world neuroscience is discovering inside us. How do we begin to *absorb* these unfamiliar cartographies arriving from the field as each missive further displaces consciousness from its sovereign seat? Perhaps the neuroscientists who suggest that their discipline just "needs a better public relations department" underestimate the profound pedagogical challenge of getting the public to integrate the astonishingly counter-intuitive information about our most intimate mechanics from the scientific "outside" into the internal maps of our brains deeply enough—that is, *beneath conscious awareness*—to make apt use of them.³⁵ We can accept the veracity of the source, see ourselves in the data, replicate certain experiments to verify the results for ourselves, acclaim the fact that our incognito brains dethrone us from our own psyches, and yet continue to live *as if* conscious awareness is still the command center of the self. Although Eagleman announces that "we have experienced the fall from the center of ourselves" and are now living in "life after the monarchy," most of us who are not neuroscientists still very much inhabit the *ancien régime*, as do our modern institutions, laws, and cultural norms.³⁶ Like so many toddling monarchs mired in solipsistic madness who insist that their sovereignty is indispensable and infallible, we do not know how to abdicate our throne because we believe so fervently in the concreteness of its reality.

And why should we abdicate, when this knowledge might also empower us to dictate our own experience? The very technological advances that fueled the neuroscientific revolution have also enabled nascent technologies that can reroute or bypass the mediation and limitations of our sensory organs. Neuroscientists who specialize in bionic technology suggest that we can repair or improve our sensory perceptions—even, some speculate, develop new sensations for which we currently lack sense organs—by fusing our bodies with a new class of prosthetics that feed electrical inputs directly into the brain.³⁷ At the technological cutting edges that expose and explore—and offer to improve—the material boundaries of selfhood, the scientific approach "from the outside" aims to find less intrusive and clever ways (currently electrodes, perhaps eventually neurodust or nanorobots) to get inside the skull to reconfigure experience by stimulating brain activity, which, of course, is what makes up mental and physical experiences in the first place. Whether or not this forecasted future of virtual reality actually arrives (and whether its arrival turns out to be utopic), the

very promise of biotechnological self-extension promulgates and naturalizes a specific sense of selfhood as the power of self-determination: "what you can control becomes the self, what you cannot control has no relation to you."³⁸ But as Lacan knows well, a self solely identified with and by the range of its control inevitably bifurcates embodied experience between the self-empowerment of giving dictations to parts of the body whose immediate obedience incorporates it into our sense of self and the self-annihilation of receiving bodily dictations indifferent to our will. The reconfigured outline of identity that biotechnological self-extension offers may indeed include prosthetic or detached body parts virtually controlled by thought, but it would also exclude most of our current bodily terrain (not to mention one's offspring, who were never controllable in the womb to begin with). Physiologically, this definition of selfhood constituted through self-control limits the self to the surface of striated muscles attached to skeletons that can respond to conscious directives. For if "what you cannot control has no relation to you," the "you" also excludes from its sense of being the body's visceral depths where the interoceptive system regulates its (our!) homeostatic needs by issuing dictates *to us* indifferent to our will. In this sense, learning to know the self predominantly from "the outside" can inadvertently cultivate an alienating relationship to one's visceral *inside*, for the route by which one enters the body subtly yet profoundly shapes where and how consciousness resides: issuing commands from its perch at the body's surface (and telekinetically extending outward to other bodies that docilely follow its commands), or inhabiting the depths where it must learn to sense and heed dictations arriving from within itself materially yet outside its self-command.

To know the self "from the outside" using prosthetic technologies introduces a subtle problem that Blake diagnoses of the innovative technologies of his day: "[t]he Microscope knows not of this, nor the Telescope. They alter / The ratio of the Spectator's Organs but leave Objects untouchd."³⁹ Blake's complaint turns a feature of lens technology—the zoom power that enables the telescope to bypass physical proximity and the microscope to sidestep material limitations of the eye's myopic focus—into its primary drawback for acquiring knowledge. Even as seventeenth and eighteenth century improvements in lens technology collapsed Newtonian distance by bringing objects closer to the eye for inspection, Blake insists that what the instrument and the eye it conditions "know[] not" is the transformative intimacy that he calls touch, which he deems to be crucial for the form of knowing that matters to him.⁴⁰ Blake embraced the affordances of technological innovations in his time. He invented his own printing technology when he found the tools available insufficient. This prophetic works readily incorporate the astonishing microscopic discoveries (globules of blood, nerve fibers) revealed by early modern scientists. But, for Blake, the problem with the forms of knowing that we might now call data collection—which "accumulate Particulates" and "aggregate" experience into "that Swell'd & bloated Form" of Universal law—is how the practice relocates and transforms the body of knowledge.⁴¹ For Blake, a body of knowledge is not some vague or abstract metaphor of collective information, nor is it predominantly stored in books or libraries as data, but rather as habits and practices cultivated and held within the bodies of the observers. Blake critiques the spectatorial eye that sees instrumentality as the natural extension of its agency because it cultivates in the observer the white-gloved habit of attentiveness that strives to remain impervious to what she observes. But if this practice of discerning truth via objectively distant data collection has informed the heart of Western scientific knowledge for centuries, it is nonetheless only one of many different knowledge practices, each of which subtly forms and conforms the body of the observer over time, delineating how and what one can see. In *Sweet Science* (the title is adopted from the end of Blake's *Four Zoas*), Amanda Jo Goldstein turns to Blake to explore the "experimental habitus" of a "minor scientist" who practices an alternative form of attentiveness that can tenderly—and quite literally—hold the entanglement between "scientific subject and spectral object."⁴² The experience of touch, when observed with minute particularity, can begin to erode our rigid distinction between object and subject insofar as both are mutually (if

subtly, so microscopic as to be illegible to the casual eye) transformed by the configuring presence of the other.

As Blake's synesthetic critique of visual technologies might suggest, his sense of touch isn't limited to the sensations that arrive through the skin conveying information about external objects. For although we might still colloquially associate touch with external objects impressing sensory information upon the body's skin-clad perimeter, neuroscientists would remind us that the majority of the neuroreceptors involved in the cluster of somatasensations we call touch (including all pain receptors) are *interoceptive*.⁴³ Perhaps Blake habitually omits touch from his catalogues of the sensory windows that open onto the world because most of signals that arrive in the brain via touch do not reveal that much about the external environment, but rather indicate the ever-shifting internal state of the body. Touch is formative as well as informative: the gentle touch so crucial to infant development, for example, may arrive from the "outside" via the caretaker's caress, yet its primary function is to teach the neonatal body the vital homeostatic skill of sensing itself.⁴⁴ The form of knowledge that matters must sink in and saturate the body before it can seep into conscious awareness.

To truly *know*, for Blake, entails the intimacy of being touched and materially transfigured by what one knows. As Goldstein writes of Blake's keen sense of the formative pressure of the external milieu, "beings develop ('become') amid relations of sensing and being sensed that, in Erasmus Darwin's terms, 'confound perception with imitation' and make basic physiological formation contingent upon sensory stimulus and mimicry [...] simply put, nobody can 'become' without *being held*."⁴⁵ But how do you hold someone through a page or book? Working mostly in semi-isolation and segregated from his audience by space and increasingly by time, Blake nonetheless endlessly strove ("mark my words! they're of your eternal salvation!") to cultivate in his reader a vital sense of the internal touch that can transform the (seemingly) external faculty of vision—yet the verb he uses may at first seem quite distant from the sensation of touch. *Behold*, he insists over and over again, as if learning to behold is what will save us from ourselves.

One of Blake's most enigmatic explorations of beholding occurs in the first plate of *For the*



Sexes: The Gates of Paradise, a small book that revises a previous work by compiling images with aphoristic phrases.⁴⁶ As is so often the case, he trains his readers' eyes and brains by introducing tension between the words and the image to disarm our default interpretative habits. At first glance, the accompanying caption seems irrelevant to the picture: "The Sun's Light when he unfolds it Depends on the Organ that beholds it." *What* exactly are we beholding? None of the nouns in the couplet (Sun, Light, Organ) show up in the image, which features a sleeping baby swaddled as a worm, or maybe a worm with a human baby's face, lying on a leaf while observed from above by a caterpillar.⁴⁷ If we treat beholding synonymously with our colloquial sense of sight as viewing objects *out there* presumably viewable to other spectators, the words and the image pull apart, straining our interpretative efforts to rhetorically bind them together into a legible constellation of meaning. But Blake's hint that the act of beholding "depends on the Organ" might remind us that although this activity usually works with the sensory information that passes

through the "optic nerve," it is not dependent upon it.⁴⁸ *How*, in this image, between an eyeless caterpillar and a sleeping baby, is beholding happening?

For Blake, beholding—a word whose biblical resonances his usage intentionally amplifies—entails an internal bodily awareness that his cultural milieu associated most closely with "spiritual sensation": "o search & see: turn your eyes inward!"⁴⁹ But crucially, for Blake, inward is not upward: he also critiques "All Bibles or sacred codes" for displacing that embodied "faculty which experiences" into a disembodied soul (or, in the wake of Romanticism, the transcendent interiority that Freud calls ego).⁵⁰ In a passage in *Jerusalem* that explores the prenatal formation of the sense organs, he emphasizes the internal brain-body backstage where the physiological and neurological processes of sensory-perception take place: "the little embryon nerves & veins / The Eye, the little Nostrils, & the delicate Tongue & Ears / of labyrinthine intricacy: so shall they fold the World."⁵¹ Blake's description of the bodily depths of the exteroceptive senses draws our attention to the labyrinthian intricacies of tiny nerves that form the internal pathways carrying the interoceptive signaling which is as crucial to every sense as its external organ.

But his constant insistence on our internal "opakeness" might also remind us that what counts as normal, modern, adult vision has largely ceded access to this material backstage. Exacerbated by an epistemic framework that dematerializes the sensory apparatus into "non-entity", we do not "behold" *how* we see in part because our cultural emphasis on transparency has inculcated us to focus on verifying *what* we think we are seeing. But newborns, as Blake observes in "Infant Joy," lack the conceptual shortcuts (useful as they undoubtedly are) that ossify the ever-shifting embodied processes generating vision into concrete and presumably verifiable objects of sight.⁵² For Eagleman reminds us that even when the eyes are functioning perfectly, "the brain has to *learn* how to see. The strange electric storms inside the pitch-black skull get turned into conscious summaries after a long haul of figuring out how objects in the world match up across the senses."⁵³ The interpretative processes by which the brain slowly learns to make sense of incoming visual information also limits what and how we see. Most neurotypical adults can readily track the "same" object over changes but can no longer see the subtle shimmer of that change. We see the world *out there* but not "the blood vessels that sit on top of the retina" which "*should* be seen superimposed on top of everything [we] look at because it's smack in front of [our] photoreceptors." Nevertheless the brain can edit away that ceaseless presence of vessels because the brain has trained itself to literally observe only novelty.⁵⁴ The literal education of the eye, especially during those formative first years, entails not only learning how to see but also unlearning certain forms of seeing. Neurologically, Barrett reminds us, every brain (but especially the infant brain) continuously "tunes" itself to "strengthen the connections between neurons that are used frequently" while it simultaneously "prun[ing]" unused connections, mimetically attuning its modes of sensing the world to match those of its most intimate caretakers.⁵⁵ Or as Blake succinctly puts it, we "became like what [we] behold."⁵⁶

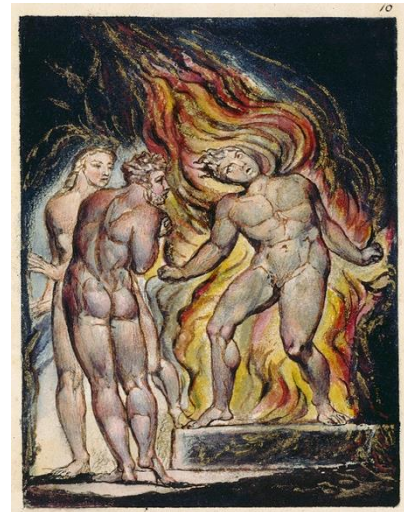
Blake's injunction to his readers to *behold* strives to cultivate a more perceptively pragmatic understanding of how vision functions. Our relationship to what we see is neither unmediated nor objective; rather, it is continuously *formative*. Beholding is a form of holding; the mimetic intimacy of keen observation properly produces the sometimes subtle, sometimes sudden transfiguration of touch rather than the transparency we erroneously expect of sight. It is in this precise sense that the newborn's untutored vision and his referential naivete can be truer than our adult perception: for the newborn (for whom, as D. W. Winnicott reminds us, there exists no distinction between itself and its milieu). There is no *what* to the act of beholding; rather, beholding *is* that relationship that sustains and transforms one's body in an active entanglement with whatever one beholds.

Although researchers once assumed that neuroplasticity disappears after childhood,⁵⁷ current research suggests that the infant's experience of becoming what she beholds can still be true for adults, though its truth is bounded by what Blake calls "the Two Limits: first of Opacity, then of Contraction."⁵⁸ Repeatedly associated with "the Solid Adam" (for alongside Eve, Adam is the only biblical human created as an adult and thus never experiences infancy), the "limit of contraction"

describes the relatively rigid state of the adult brain, whose capacity for knowing is curtailed by what he already knows.⁵⁹ The specialization formed by experience which enables the healthy adult brain to maneuver deftly through its particular milieu comes at the cost of losing some of the infant brain's expansive neuroplasticity.⁶⁰ We'll return to the question of contraction and expansion later; it's worth noting for now that Blake does not dwell for long on Adam, instead focusing his attention on the limit of "Opacity [...] named Satan."⁶¹

In a pivotal moment in *Milton* that we briefly explored in chapter 3, Blake describes how "Opacity" occurs "in every Human bosom":⁶²

Thus Satan rag'd amidst the Assembly; and his bosom grew
Opake against the Divine Vision; the paved terraces of.
His bosom inwards shone with fires. But the stones becoming
opake.
Hid him from sight. in an extreme blackness and darkness,
And there a World of deeper Ulro was open'd in the midst
Of the Assembly. In Satans bosom a vast unfathomable Abyss.⁶³



Once again, attentive observation reveals odd discrepancies between the poem and the illustration on the facing page. In this sole visual depiction of Satan in Blake's *Milton* poem, internal and external spaces flipflop between words and image.⁶⁴ If Satan is "hid[den] from sight," why do we (and presumably the members of the "Assembly" gazing at him from the left) see him? If his bosom is shining *inward* with fires, why does it appear to radiate outward from his body, so fluidly following the contours of his form that he seems to channel them? And why is there no visual hint of the verbally terrifying "vast, unfathomable Abyss" on his bosom or in his facial expression, which instead shimmers with rockstar aura as he dances on his elevated podium, at once burning and unconsumed by the flames? Even as the text is signifying doom and gloom, visually, Satan seems to be "on fire" not with tragic self-immolation but simply because he's smokin' hot and knows it. The poem's proclamation of Satan's opakeness to his internal Divine Vision—which Blake locates here and elsewhere as the origin of the Fall—appears to our "Optic Nerve" as a muscular display of self-possessed agency. Blake's Satan is a personality that amplifies the making of modern personhood: his characteristic opacity marks a style of embodiment that so profoundly refuses to inhabit the internal body that the visceral depths become uninhabitable to him. But as Satan's nonchalance towards his own opacity might suggest, opacity is itself invisible, for it exists as a narrowing of vision to the viewable. The opacity of vision to the full depths of its own embodied modus operandi, paradoxically, constricts "sight" to our commonsensical paradigm of the eyes as transparent lens opening unmediated to the external world beyond the skin.

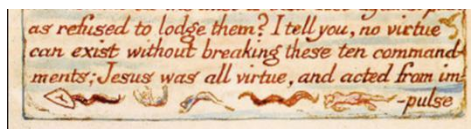
But if opacity cannot be *seen*, it can still be felt.⁶⁵ Blake points out that just as vision is not limited to the eyeballs or the "optic nerve", opacity does not occur in the eye (though its ramification includes changes in visual perception, as the optic nerve "shutting the sun. & moon. & stars. & trees. & clouds. & waters") but "in every human bosom," where "every thing is fixd Opake without Internal light."⁶⁶ The viscosity of opakeness and light returns us to the question "the Suns Light" and "the organ that beholds it" in the opening plate of *The Gates of Paradise*. For Blake, the organ that beholds is not the organ of the eye, but the hidden interoceptive sensibility that silently informs *how* the eye sees.⁶⁷ Blake's insistence on the materiality of the "inward eye" reminds us that what he calls *divine* does not refer to some extraterrestrial source, but rather a cultivated attunement to the inner mechanics withinside the diffuse and interconnected interoceptive and nervous systems through

which the brain-body silently self-generates all sensory-perception.⁶⁸ If what Blake calls "the limit of Adam" describes the temporal limits of neuroplasticity as the brain configures itself to constellate the specifications of knowledge, "the limits of Opacity" are spatial, emphasizing the experiential chasm between the conscious self and the far reaches of the nervous system that Damasio reminds us is physiologically entangled with the interoceptive body.⁶⁹ For it is via the interoceptive bodily dictates that occur in the viscera (or Blake's term "bosom") and not Descartes's pineal gland, that the mind and body can meet as embodied knowledge seeps into a consciousness that relaxes its vigilance against what arises from below. The "improvement of sensual enjoyment" that Blake insists will "cleanse" the "doors of perception" requires cultivating interoceptive awareness, or as he instructs his readers, learning to "turn your eyes inward" to behold their own materiality at work.⁷⁰

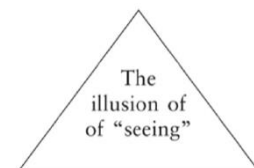
seeing change

How much does the voraciousness of our modern eyes arise from the neurological paradox that the eye needs change to see, yet most of us are not good at seeing change? Oliver Sacks elaborates on the first part of this chiasmus when he explains why virtually everyone subjected to prolonged sensory deprivation will experience hallucinations: "the brain needs not only perceptual input but also perceptual *change*, and the absence of change may cause not only lapses of arousal and attention but perceptual aberrations as well."⁷¹ In a rigorous sense, perceptual input *is* perceptual change because "perception reflects the active comparison of sensory inputs with internal predications" such that "awareness of your surroundings occurs only when sensory inputs *violate* expectations."⁷² And yet amidst the sensory bombardment of everyday modern life, violating the brain's expectations prominently enough to observe the difference—or as Blake puts it, to live by "the daughters of inspiration" rather than the "daughters of memory"—can be surprisingly difficult.⁷³ When we compare two nearly identical images or gaze upon a live scene, neuroscientists remind us that "we are blind to shockingly large changes" (which is how magicians pull off their tricks).⁷⁴ Describing the common perceptive habit of change-blindness, Eagleman explains, "you are not seeing the world in the rich detail you implicitly believe you were; in fact, you are not aware of most of what hits your eyes."⁷⁵ Blake encapsulates the difference between what hits the eyes and the limited perception that our brains tend to construct in a counter-intuitive aphorism: "the eye sees more than the heart knows."⁷⁶ What blocks us from fully observing what hits our retinas, he insists in a complementary diagnosis to the current neuroscientific theories, is the post-Romantic heart that thinks it already knows and owns itself. Although Blake is sometimes heralded as a Romantic hero acting vigorously on heartfelt impulses,⁷⁷ the bodily action that his work would train in readers dilates the aperture of perception from within. By slowing down *how* we see, Blake painstakingly cultivates the eye (and the heart) to observe what so readily escapes its notice.

Countless readers over centuries—including editors of the reference text used and cited by virtually every Blakean scholar—skipped a crucial beat in one of Blake's most famous expressions celebrating impulsive action. Almost every transcription of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* relays this



pivotal line as: "Jesus was all virtue and acted from im/pulse: not from rules."⁷⁸ But as Steven Goldsmith keenly points out in his reading of the estranging materiality of the Blakean pulse, these transcriptions—which follow the anticipated flow of



the line's logic as dictated by our "daughters of memory"—missed a word: "the last syllable of [impulse] carries over from plate 23 to plate 24 in a way that no transcription can effectively render

because it cannot reproduce the effect, at once disruptive and quickly forgotten, of turning a page."⁷⁹ Like the optical illusion psychologists use to demonstrate the opacity of our own vision produced by our anticipatory habits of seeing, the repetition escapes the eye because it is "so exceedingly common and quick and small as to elude representation, except by tricks that would suggest it obliquely."⁸⁰ Yet if Blake plays tricks that only extremely attentive readers might catch, he nonetheless also warns against developing the state of hypervigilant surveillance that he calls "Satans Watch Fiends", which futilely seeks to ward against deceptions that consciousness unwittingly plays on itself.⁸¹ It doesn't work; as Lily Gurton-Wachter observes, "the Watch Fiends in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* are distinguished by their inability to find things."⁸² Consciousness cannot fully catch itself in the act of observation through an exertion of the will, nor can it correct for the mistakes it doesn't realize it's making. Instead, even as Blake describes the sentimental heart that misidentifies everything it sees as a projection of itself, he nonetheless insists that cultivating perceptiveness takes place through the heart—not the seat of authentic identity that the word now widely connotes in our post-Romantic age ("just follow your heart!"), but through our visceral relationship to the pulse. For in the frequently misread line above, the fracturing of impulse and the hidden repetition of its second syllable into im/-pulse / -pulse, "mimicking in the sound and meaning the cardiac rhythm that contracts and expands the artery," transforms the impulse of sentiment into a barely perceptible yet persistent beat of the organ inside your bosom.⁸³ Blake's curious instruction to "turn your eyes inward" redirects us from the external sights that arrive through our exteroceptive organs to instead observe the interoceptive site where perception—"perceiv'd by those senses that are clos'd from thought"—resembles an inverted form of touch: feeling the visceral body quietly going about its homeostatic housekeeping.⁸⁴ But what exactly are we feeling *for* as attention begins to probe the "unfathomable Abyss" wherein the subtle, slippery beat of the hidden heart resides?⁸⁵

This question sharply divides researchers debating the value of interoceptive sensitivity, for which the standard measurement is a heartbeat detection test that serves as a "generalized index" for the mind's awareness of internal bodily process.⁸⁶ Although currently indispensable to researchers who have yet to discover a better alternative, there is much concern over both the scientific efficacy and practical value of that measurement: "the measurement of interoception is generally acknowledged to be the biggest difficulty within the field."⁸⁷ The internal changes that arise to the level of conscious awareness (hunger, bathroom signals, pain, sleepiness, heartbeat, etc.) are but a minuscule portion of the vast range of bidirectional signaling between body and brain. The sheer ability to feel or follow the heart's pulsing rhythm is distinct from the ability to interpret it well.⁸⁸ Researchers readily acknowledge that the threshold of interoceptive sensitivity can be lowered through certain meditation practices, such that subtle bodily actions that are formerly "opaque" become palpable to the "inward eye." The disagreement is over what cultivating sensitivity actually *does* to us. Many worry that developing keener awareness of bodily dictations would only exacerbate our anxieties and make us—like "Satans Watch Fiends"—incessant yet incompetent scryers of our own bodies. Science journalist Jessica Wapner distills the research that warns against "increasing people's interoceptive curiosity."⁸⁹ Although "interoception can help us see ourselves more clearly, it may be at its most accurate when it is, in itself, invisible."⁹⁰ For Wapner, we are better off acquiring that promised clarity by bypassing conscious interoceptive awareness altogether, to instead rely on technologies to detect and interpret *unconscious* interoceptive signals—for example, discerning metabolic changes that might herald the early, currently undetectable stage of some cancers:

The unconscious signals are often the trustworthy ones. The complication begins when we try to listen in and understand what we're hearing. We're urged, for all sorts of reasons, to listen to our hearts. But a life looking inward isn't necessarily a life lived well. "You don't want to be focused too much on the body," Garfinkel said,

"You want to be focused on the world."⁹¹

The concern here, that observing the viscera is literally and morally navel-gazing, softens the tone of Immanuel Kant's critique that "undivided attention to inner, bodily sensations [...] would be a sickness of the faculty of attention."⁹² Yet it shares the same assumptions so deeply embedded in the Western episteme that cultivating internal awareness is inevitably solipsistic, for one can only turn inward by withdrawing from the world of human affairs. Or, as eighteenth century writer Frances Burney puts it, too much attention directed towards one's own body "forgets all mankind, to watch the pulsations of its own fancies."⁹³ The conflation of bodily feeling with an active imagination in Burney's old-fashioned term, "fancy," captures the admixture of the two in Wapner's sense of "looking inward." Inwardness—"listen[ing] to the heart"—is here a palimpsest of the *internal* field of bodily sensations with the churning *interiority* in which the anxious or hypochondriac mind charges those sensations with catastrophic significance, leading to the vicious cycle of heightened scrutiny exacerbating bodily reactivity and vice versa. As Wapner's opening invocation of the figure of the hypochondriac suggests, a fixation upon feeling one's own pulses or "listening to the body" can be counterproductive towards even one's goal of wellness, tipping self-surveillance of the body into disease. What is missing from the anxious or hypochondriac fixation with the body is insight of the animal body or bodies in animalistic states of infancy: the ability to accurately read—that is, to feel and follow—the body's dictates in each embodied moment.

If Wapner's suggested solution for procuring insight into our internal state relies on the mediation of new and powerful external tools to bypass the fallibilities of consciousness, Blake radically insists—even doubling down—on the contrary: we need to cultivate our understanding of the "inward eye" in order to heal not just our own bodies, but our body politic.⁹⁴ The key to cultivation is *how* the mind comes to inhabit the body that it senses. For Blake, for whom "thought turned the infinite into a serpent," the problem that he diagnoses with that serpent's "Watch Fiends" is not the sheer viscosity of the sensations that Western thinkers have found so abhorrent, but the mind's reactions to what it observes in the body, which itself produces bodily affects.⁹⁵ The question that Blake's heroine Oothoon poses—"tell me what is a thought & of what substance is it made?"—is an epistemological gauntlet that insists on the materiality of thinking. Her question points out that "thought" does not merely interpret (or misinterpret) bodily states "untouchd" from a spectatorial distance, but also always and inevitably, if subtly and ineptly, influences the body's ongoing housekeeping and thus formations of conscious thoughts that arise as part of that homeostatic process.⁹⁶ Yet within a "fallen" body schema marked by internal opakeness such that consciousness cannot observe the subtle material reverberations of its own thoughts, Blake insists that dualistic thought enacts a particularly inept habit that seeks to restore relation to the body through telekinetic control. Often read as figures of state surveillance, "Satans Watch Fiends" exemplifies a top-down style of embodiment that so deeply distrusts the invisible workings of the automatic body that consciousness seeks to wrest control of the body's involuntary functions even if it does not know how to drive. Blake's critique of the Watch Fiends isn't that they observe the body, but rather how poorly they know the body such that they cannot observe it without seeking to regulate and control it. Unable to feel and unwilling to follow interoceptive dictates, the dualistic mind tries to turn interoception itself into an object under the (mis)management of consciousness.

But what Satanic opakeness and the incompetent surveillance of his Watch Fiends miss—and what in fact, a rigidly scrying consciousness renders impossible to inhabit—is precisely what matters most: a particular form of cultivated attentiveness that can sink deeply into the involuntary body without disturbing its skillful work. In an often-cited pair of passages from *Milton*, Blake situates this experience of literally feeling his heartbeat at the heart of poetic labor:

For in this Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great
Events of Time start forth & are conceiv'd in such a Period
Within a Moment: a Pulsation in the artery.

[...]

There is a moment in each Day that Satan cannot find
Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find
This Moment & it multiply. & when it once found
It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed⁹⁷

What is this moment in which "The Poets work is done"? For Blake, a moment is not an "intermeasureable" unit of clock-time. "The hours of folly are measur'd by the clock," declares one of the proverbs in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "but of wisdom, no clock can measure."⁹⁸ In one sense, Blake's entire critique of modernity is that our understanding of time and space and the bodies bound by Newtonian coordinates have become "intermeasurable" and "abstract"—governed by a false sense of objectivity that is removed from and untouch'd by the expanding and contracting experiences occurring "withinside" the bodies themselves.⁹⁹ For Blake, what cannot be measured by the clock is specifically attuned to its own material coordination: his vital moment is "a Pulsation of the artery," a subtle and ever-shifting bodily sensation that responds to and self-regulates its internal and external milieus.¹⁰⁰ For pulsations are not imaginary, though the rhythm responds to acts of the imagination (which, under the extreme conditions that trigger a heart attack, can even arrest its beat). The human pulse (like those of all mammals) began beating before the development of the anatomical heart or brain, its rapid-fire percussion sustained for many months by the slower rhythms of the maternal heartbeat as the pulse coordinates for itself a body made up of its material surroundings. For the adult consciousness the pulse is simultaneously spatial (felt in specific bodily locations) and temporal (a rhythm which Blake associates with the sensitive aptness of poetic meter) and its current rhythm and texture can only be discerned by the mind it sustains when attention is anchored in the interoceptive body. In the passages above, Blake locates in the "minute particular[ities]" of the pulse an astonishing and radical potential to unsettle our allegiance to the unchanging and unfeeling precision of industrialized clock-time. Closely examined and deeply felt, the pulse, for Blake, is not just an alternative mode of keeping time, but enables one to *inhabit* time differently—as a sensitive tempo responsive to the variations of a pre-existing beat rather than a droning metronome. In *Milton*, the pulse awareness that Blake associates with poetry serves as a visceral aperture to observe *how* the body coordinates material changes with the tempo and rhythms of both its own homeostatic needs and other bodies in its intimate proximity.

Blake's insistence on the importance of cultivating the somatic experience of time is gaining traction among neuroscientists who study the nascent field of time perception. Although most researchers insist "there is no single part of the body or brain that keeps time,"¹⁰¹ and although the specific mechanisms at work differ according to an event's duration, there is growing consensus that much of "perceived duration arises from the way the brain takes in and processes sensory input, which is ultimately shaped by fluctuations within visceral organs like the heart, the lungs, the gut."¹⁰² Some neuroscientists go so far as to insist that time *is* that somatic change, both consciously felt by the mind as the passage of time and unconsciously tracked by the body. Among the interoceptive signals that contribute to our sense of time, the heartbeat plays a key role; emerging research—which probes "intervals too brief for conscious perception or feelings"—suggests that "the moment-to-moment experience of time is synchronized with, and changes with, the length of a heartbeat."¹⁰³ This subtle, synchronized variability in our experience of time is true of *all* experience, but it makes headlines as a scientific discovery because we do not typically inhabit the body deeply enough to sense these subtle changes as they occur. Crucially, for Blake, the depth of embodied experience at

the moment of perception can translate into a productive dilation of time, during which the "minute particulars" of experience forged by the brain and body become briefly visible.

My students often want to know what drug Blake was on. Some (especially those who come to Blake by way of Aldous Huxley) are incredulous when I explain that although Blake was the opposite of prudish, he never mentioned any drugs and scholars largely assume that whatever neurochemical states he experiences are the product of his own brain. But if Huxley popularized *The Doors of Perception* (alongside its sequel *Heaven and Hell*) as a reference to the mind-bending effects of mescaline, Blake points to a different source of time dilation: poetry.¹⁰⁴ Specially, the experience of inhabiting embodied time in which "the Poets Work is Done." This dilation and proliferation of time is tucked in the ordinary moments that occur "in each Day," and rather than hitting us out of nowhere with the force of an imminent crisis that prompts our brain to enact emergency measures, Blake encourages us to actively *find* it through "Unceasing Practise."¹⁰⁵ But note the subtle and complex grammatical shifts across his description of the poetic moment: it is the "industrious" who does the finding, yet Blake's insistence that the moment *itself* multiplies suggests that the aptness of its placement and proliferation operates outside of the seeker's agency, beneath conscious direction. Even before the poet picks up a pen or opens a laptop, before the words arrive in the mind, poetic labor has already begun, literally bound to the heartbeat which can only be found and felt when the mind is most keenly attuned to one's own interoceptive signals. This renovative state of being that Blake calls poetry is characterized by *how*—how deeply, how tenderly, how openly—the poet inhabits his internal body, allowing its dictates to guide his words and actions. For unlike anxiety (which Blake also knew intimately as the "nervous fear" that hampers his creativity) or hypochondria that transforms keen awareness of bodily sensations into plotlines calling for intervention or revenge, poetic attentiveness reposes on a "couch of gold" to inhabit a state in which conscious animation is suspended as the mind catches a glimpse of what is normally opaque to consciousness.¹⁰⁶ If "poetry makes nothing happen" in W. H. Auden's famous line, Blake might specify that this nothingness is the peculiar mode of cultivated consciousness that can observe the internal body at work without seizing control of its workings.¹⁰⁷

But to what end? If elite athletes spend countless hours consciously and deliberately drilling skills into their neurology in order to be able to *not think* in competition ("just do it!"), *just do* during competition, Blake's description of the poetic moment inverts the relationship between practice and performance, between the extraordinary "peak" moment and ordinary states of being. The poetic "moment," Goldsmith observes, "does not exist for those who seek it as an object of pursuit; it occurs only as a slackening in the taut fabric of motivated activity."¹⁰⁸ Counterintuitively, the poem is not the crowning achievement of poetic practice (which may be why Blake never quite "finishes" many of his works, continually revising and reprinting decades after he self-prints the first copies). Rather, by teaching the mind *how* to inhabit somatic time, the daily repetition of the poetic moment cultivates neurological pathways by which the mind might slowly learn to settle into the increasing depth and density of bodily awareness, glacially eroding its deeply entrenched habit of dualism. Blake's claim in the *Laocoön*—his multimedia treatise on creativity and one of his last works—that "Prayer is the study of art" might be understood in the sense of prayer that Niklaus Largier describes of medieval mystics and monks: as an "investment in practices that transform and transfigure ways of perception and of inhabiting the world."¹⁰⁹ Prophetically anticipating twenty-first century neuroscientists who confirm the plasticity of our perceptions shaped by embodied practices, Blake specifies that this transfiguration takes place deep in the interoceptive body and brain as the mind learns *how* to be consciously attentive to this incessant bodily network of sensing and signaling that operates beneath its consent. For unlike the athlete who can relax once his event is over (though perhaps he is already preparing for the next one), Blake reminds us that "Without Unceasing Practise nothing can be done Practise is Art" means "If you leave off you are Lost."¹¹⁰ Our attention is

constantly drifting off, interoceptive sensitivity and the sensibility to read one's body well are lost as quickly as they are found, thus the "moment" requires constant renewal. Satan "never can be redeem'd" if we understand redemption as a restoration to a former station or static state.¹¹¹ Rather, like the renovative "moment" whose right placement saturates daily life, embodied attentiveness "must be new created continually moment by moment."¹¹² The dilation of time produced by the poetic labor of attending to interoceptive signals is multiplied beneath conscious effort (or even awareness) through a saturation of the attentive quality of that moment, carried into the bodily habitus of how the poet inhabits every other moment of the day.

Against the grain of our cultural assumption that observation of one's own body is solipsistic, Blake makes astonishing and grand claims for what sinking into this poetic moment can do: "all the Great / Events of Time start forth & are conceived in such a Period."¹¹³ Blake's crucial term, "conceiv'd," tethers the mental concept—which, as Nietzsche notes, can so easily drift off into abstraction—to the physiological labor of childbearing for which abstraction is useless. Rendered in a passive voice that lacks a grammatical subject, the conception and gestation of poetic labor (not unlike the gestation of a human infant, which can be sustained by a comatose maternal body) occur beneath subjectivity. Rather than the strenuous activity of the will or muscular agency, poetic conception occurs to and within the potent duration of the moment, which itself gestates "all the Great / Events of Time" in their embryonic states when their activity is real but minuscule, hidden inside the body before bearing forth obvious fruit. What is the relationship between the visceral inside and the visible outside, between the embryonic form and its flowering? What is that universe inside the bosom that expands outwards through the habit of pulse awareness?

*

In *Jerusalem*, Blake returns to illuminate what escapes the surveillance of Satan's Watch Fiends. "In every bosom a Universe expands," Blake writes, accessible through "a Gate of precious stones and gold" that "cannot be found / By Satans Watch-fiends tho' they search numbering every grain / Of sand on Earth every night, they never find this Gate."¹¹⁴ The problem with *how* the Watch-fiends search is that their enumerating technique makes a thorough sweep of every grain that exists, yet even as they are relentlessly looking for *the* object of special distinction, they do not know how to look deeply at any of the grains of sand that pass before their eyes. When Blake reiterates this line again a few pages later, he specifies that this gate isn't so much hidden by the sands, as the Watch Fiends searching through them seem to believe. Rather, the gate is contained within a single grain: "There is a Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find / Nor can his Watch Fiends find it: tis translucent and has many Angles."¹¹⁵ Sand is simply the weathering and erosion of rocks and organic matter into particulates small enough to be tossed and gathered by the waves. Examined closely, it's not that difficult to find a translucent grain of sand with lots of angles on a beach, especially if one is looking with an expansive state of mind "away from all Care [...] Remote from desire." What is so special about *this* grain? In a letter to Thomas Butts written shortly after he arrives at Felpham, Blake describes a visionary experience—"My Eyes did Expand—that begins on a beach:

To my Friend Butts I write
My first Vision of Light
On the yellow sands sitting
The Sun was Emitting
His Glorious beams
From Heavens high Streams
Over Sea over Land
My Eyes did Expand
Into regions of air

Away from all Care
 Into regions of fire
 Remote from Desire
 The Light of the Morning
 Heavens Mountain adorning
 In particles bright
 The jewels of Light
 Distinct shone & clear
 Amazd & in fear
 I each particle gazed
 Astonishd Amazed¹¹⁶

What exactly is Blake looking at in this moment? It is neither an interpretative leap nor feat to suggest that the "gate of precious stones and gold" linked with a "grain of sand" in *Jerusalem* (which he began working on during his Felpham stay) was partially inspired by this moment at Felpham beach, as Blake gazed at "yellow sand" which glowed as "jewels of Light." A grain of translucent quartz, catching the light at a particular angle, would indeed flash in the sun—but how does that commonplace natural phenomenon induce a visionary experience and multiple poems for Blake? The poem continues:

For each was a Man
 Human formd. Swift I ran
 For they beckond to me
 Remote by the Sea
 Saying" Each grain of Sand
 Every Stone on the Land
 Every rock & each hill
 Each fountain & rill
 Each herb & each tree
 Mountain hill earth & Sea
 Cloud Meteor & Star
 Are Men Seen Afar¹¹⁷

How did sand and rocks and stones and plants become "human formd" in Blake's eyes?

I do not know *what* Blake saw that day, but he clearly tells us *how* he beholds: gazing in astonishment at "each participle" that "distinct shone & clear." Neuroscientists remind us that what we see is always subtly (or sometimes even drastically) inflected by *how* we see. Even the most ordinary vision is bound up in our interoceptive processes such that, in the moment of observation, the state of the internal body-brain literally and fully constructs the experience. "For the Eye alters all," Blake says.¹¹⁸ In this expansive moment unimpeded by worries and yearnings, reposing on a golden couch of beach sand, Blake was struck by a visceral and visible paradigm shift in *how* he perceives the external world. "If you asked me what I saw," Ludwig Wittgenstein writes in *Philosophical Investigations*, "perhaps I shall be able to make a sketch which shews you; but I shall mostly have no recollection of the way my glance shifted in looking at it."¹¹⁹ Blake's visionary talent is partially the ability to see—and to know that he is seeing—the changes that occur beneath recollection in other viewers, even one as keen-eyed as Wittgenstein.

What struck Blake "Astonishd Amazd" in this moment is the recognition that what he calls "human formd" is not limited to humanity as a distinct species, but exists also in each and

every part of the external scene unfolding before his eyes. The human "seen afar"--perhaps also afar in time--is not a homunculus outline contained within (or projected upon) the natural world, but a keen and visceral sense that, despite the "vital dehiscence" that separates humanity from *recognizing* the traces of ourselves currently devastating the nonhuman world and the reach of that world deep into us, there is no human without the inhuman elements that form our bodies and brains, that ultimately make up consciousness itself. Invisible to the eye scrying for causation and contact as the tangent point where the outlines of two bodies visibly touch, Blake sees the subtle and incessant relationships between bodies as the intimate exchanges that transform a body over time and exposure. At the end of *Jerusalem*, Blake returns to this vision of "All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone" to expand the borders of the human body beyond the false sense of insularity suggested by our skins and skulls to include all the material influences near and afar that our bodies continuously receive and generate, "living, going forth & returning wearied / Into the Planetary lives."¹²⁰ The post-apocalyptic body--like all bodies, including our current forms--lacks any rigid ontological distinction between its internal and outside, for every body can exit only through the constant, subtle interaction between the two. The outline is an illusion exposed by time. The difference, then, between the fallen body and the redeemed body, Blake insists, is the eye's ability to *observe* in real time this vital yet subtle exchange between the inside and the outside, between one body and all others. For the alternations in *what* we see occurs not just as an obvious visual shift in the external object, but first and foremost as a deep paradigm change in one's internal state—including a state of mind—that transforms how the eye relates to the objects that appear to be projected out in the world.¹²¹ Yet especially in his late works, Blake's deep and abiding interest in the complex interactions between the inner (what we might now call the interoceptive) eye and the outer organ is largely channeled into his fascination with uncovering the hidden communal embodiment that he calls the "human divine." How might this form of seeing—or this vision of form—begin to change our understanding of what it means to be a body?

In 1793, Blake published an earlier version of his worm/baby pairing—without the couplet—as the opening page to a book whose pedagogical function he makes explicit in its title: *For the Children: The Gates of Paradise*. The curiously grand title Blake gives to this cameo exploration of the formative relationship between the human and non-human animal is "What is Man!" For what is at stake is the question of what it means to be human and how our spectatorially-oriented species might learn to inhabit this earth without destroying it. The worm and the infant make a brief appearance in *The First Book of Urizen*, published the next year, as specimens respectively marking the origin and endpoint of a Urizenic vision of evolution marching towards humanity as its apex:

Many sorrows and dismal throes
 Many forms of fish, bird & beast
 Brought forth an Infant form
 Where was a worm before.¹²²

The Urizenic consciousness experiences the material transformation from worm to man as a progressive series in which one species replaces and displaces another. Still, triumph of the species inevitably turns to tragedy within the individual narrative arcs of each human life that becomes "at death the food of worms."¹²³ But here in this image offered as a pedagogical key to an alternative form of seeing and being, the infant remains wormlike, for Blake positions his viewer to *see* the past form in the present body. The kinship between the infant and the worm forged by acts of beholding reminds us that forms of worm-life have not disappeared from either the planet or from our human

form, but have only been erroneously erased from humanity's image of itself. The infant-worm is precisely placed upon—perhaps even tethered to—the "spine" of a leaf whose veiny branches resemble the placental veins and arteries that both make up a prenatal body, binding it to earliest, most intimate and formative milieu. Or, as Blake puts it in the passage from *Jerusalem* we glanced at earlier, its body and being are cradled and crafted by hands that "weave the little embyron nerves & veins / The Eye, the little Nostrils, & the delicate Tongue & Ears / of labyrinthine intricacy: so shall they fold the World."¹²⁴ Blake's crucial term, *fold*, reminds us that the world arrives in the body not just as sensation or information passively observed by an impervious mind (as in the Lockean "camera obscura" paradigm that Blake frequently cites) but is quite literally incorporated into the body's formation as incessant if subtle physiological changes that transform the smoothness of the fetal brain at twenty weeks into the characteristic walnut-wrinkled folds the brain already acquires at a full-term birth. To *see* the worm in the "infant form" requires recognizing the body and brain as undeniably entangled with our material milieu—including the tender care of visible and invisible hands that literally made up our sensory faculties.¹²⁵ The mimetic transference between worm and infant in this intimate constellation is unmistakable: beholding deflates the levitation of consciousness that Nietzsche both laments and idolizes, and it shatters the illusion of self-mastery that, for Lacan, marks the "vital dehistance" by which humanity elevates a sense of self over and above other animals, thereby severing contact with them.

Blake's sense of beholding slowly tends to that breach *not* through an imaginative projection or identification with non-human creatures but by cultivating the embodied intimacy of *observing* the vital material connections intricately at work withinside our bodies, which inevitably reveals that our body and being are constituted through the collective work of other bodies and beings. The worm returns in the last illuminated image from the *Gates of Paradise* series, in an image whose caption declares: "I have said to the Worm: Thou art my mother & my sister."¹²⁶ As Feldman reminds us, calling our attention to our "distant cousins," the worm-like amphioxys that lived 550 million years ago, moving through the world using a "meager nervous system [that] included a teeny clump of cells that was not a brain," convey a crucial lesson about our own brains: "Your brain's most important job is not thinking. It's running a little worm body that has become very, very complicated."¹²⁷ Becoming-worm is neither terrifying nor tragic, but it does require a radical orientation of consciousness *toward* rather than away from the body. For beholding that enables us to see the inheritance of the worm's simple interoceptive system at work in our immensely complex, consciousness-generating brains does not merely remind us of our animality as one conceptual framework to replace or place alongside another. Rather, Blake suggests that the *practice* of beholding slowly returns thought to the service of the body to literally re-member us as vital animals whose nervous systems, including the brain—as the neuroscientists endlessly insist because we endlessly forget—evolved to coordinate the homeostatic needs of the body, not to find creative escapes from the bodies we abhor and think we can do without.

Blake's writings on the "grain of sand," scattered throughout his oeuvre, also contain a clue about what prevents our fallen sight from acquiring the visionary capacity his work labors to redeem. In *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, he places particular emphasis on describing *how* each grain of sand becomes incorporated into a larger body. In *Jerusalem*, as "every Minute Particularity hardend into grains of sand," its ossified inside can no longer observe anything.¹²⁸ Instead, like the "souls bak'd / into bricks to build the pyramids," the grains of sands are aggregated as "intermeasurable" building materials to create the mighty symbols of power that still draw tourists today: "all his pyramids were grains of sand."¹²⁹ Pyramids—recurring as both words and images that Blake associates with the Egyptian structures—mark a particularly problematic form of collectivity, one that depends on intermeasurable units (like the "brothels [built] with bricks of religion") stacked to an impressive and imposing height.¹³⁰ As Goldsmith notes, pyramids often signal the entrenched problem of self-

deception, such that when a character "thinks he sees without boundaries into heaven, with all the force of a transparent, unmediated revelation," Blake instead positions the reader to see "the confining framework that indicates otherwise."¹³¹ But he further specifies that "pyramids of pride" mark not just a *what* but a *how*.¹³² The ideological rigidity of self-righteousness is itself shored up by a particular form of embodiment; for what enables the impressive edifice to hold itself together over millennia is an aggregate relationship between its material parts. In contrast to the "minute particulars" which shine with its "own internal light," Blake repeatedly lambastes "the Aggregate"—"that Swelld & bloated Form"—by which material objects are compacted into an arrangement that maximizes the obduracy of their hardened outlines.¹³³ The structural integrity of both the pyramid form and each of its constituent parts depends upon their very resistance to interpenetration. The pyramid is not just a physical edifice; it embodies and perpetuates modes of thinking and living that subtly dictate how a self relates to its body and how bodies relate to each other. In its functional purpose (tombs constructed by enslaved bodies to safeguard privileged dead bodies against decay and desecration) and its construction (an aggregate of "intermeasurable" units), the pyramid *is* the ossified form that resists weathering and breakdown into sandy material elements, and its constitution is motivated by the terror he describes in *Jerusalem*: "The Cities & Villages of Albion become Rock & Sand Unhumanized."¹³⁴ The ramification of a particular logic of embodiment that emphasizes maintaining its structural integrity at all costs is that its inevitable disaggregation can only be experienced as a form of obliteration, annihilating the bounded form that the inhabitants of these desolated cities view as the only way to be human.

Blake's most subtle critique of aggregate formation is that its composition depends upon not just the rigid and tight placement of each unit, but also the structural integrity of its individual units in maintaining their own outlines. Each brick in that pyramid must not crumble for the entire edifice to stand securely, which is why each is baked to harden them. In this sense, individualism—even as one resists aggregation into a larger body, even as one rejects "intermeasurable" conformity—can unwittingly perpetuate pyramid logic in its emphasis on maintaining the integrity of individual outlines. Blake's short poem "The Clod and the Pebble," contrasts the "Pebble of the brook" that "seeketh only Self to please" against a "little clod of clay" which, "trodden with the cattles feet," is on the verge of breaking apart.¹³⁵ Yet whereas the clod of clay supports new forms of life with its own dissipation into soil, this pebble celebrating "only Self" perhaps ends up as the "black pebble on the enraged beach" that exemplifies the fall into opakeness in *Milton*, which give to "their possessors to trouble & sorrow & care."¹³⁶ For Blake, the naturalized and indisputable possessiveness inherent in the pebble's claim of privileging itself at the cost of others has *epistemological* consequences, creating an optical fall into our everyday visual habits that "Shut[] the sun. & moon. & stairs. & trees. & clouds. & waters. / And hills. out from the Optic Nerve & hardening it into a bone." Prophetically anticipating the counterintuitive claim made by twenty-first century neuroscientists, Blake insists that the myopia of "normal" vision is not figurative: we *literally fail to perceive what is right in front of our eyes*, and this failure does not occur in the eyeball (for, in a sense, *misperception* is inherent to our current threshold of *perception*). Rather, failure haunts the process by which human brains *form* vision through the eyeball.. But extending beyond the scope of most neuroscientists, Blake attributes the cause of this fall to our inaccurate understanding of what it means to be a self and a body. The reason why we perpetually fail to observe the subtle and incessant material traffic vitally connects bodies to each other, he insists, is because modern "selfhood" has come to be defined by the very potent sense of proprietary boundary between self and other, a boundary that is perpetuated even in its reversal, such as the clod of clay's servile logic of service to others whose merits are measured by its self-denial. But the body that refuses to be interpenetrated with/by other bodies has

fundamentally misunderstood that what it means to be a "living form" is to be shared with the passing remnants of other bodies.¹³⁷

For Blake, the fall into opakeness is only a vision away from redemption, for this misunderstanding is perpetuated by our refusal to "turn [our] eyes inward" and observe our own material constitution.¹³⁸ Communal life and the keenness of sight and insight that enable us to see our interminglings are bound together, accessible only via the deep interoceptive observation of the relationships *between* bodies withinside each and every body. For Blake, *beholding* this connection—rather than just abstractly seeing it without absorbing its ramifications—requires the cultivated willingness to inhabit the body that can truly hold in itself the contemplation of its own disaggregation. For if the disintegration of one's current form is an inevitable and ongoing material condition of all bodies, Blake's most joyous writings also bear witness to its corollary truth: each body is *already* on its way to become another, and another, and another. The fading of one form is only a terror and a tragedy when observed through the pyramid logic that erroneously expects material forms to be static, to endure forever. For bodies are not ossified forms to be defended from invading time; they are always already changing, eroding, and transforming beneath and beyond the dictates of the subject who may prefer one peculiar outline over others. Although a flower tinged with human consciousness may (like the timid Thel) "weep" and "complain & sigh for immortality," Blake reminds us that the fading of the flower is also the "fruit breaking from its bud," such that the rupture of one form is also a continuation in another.¹³⁹

If this transformation is easier to see and celebrate *as* a transition in the plant form than our human ones, Blake turns to a plant to teach the human how to behold the extended body that makes up his post-apocalyptic vision. In a passage in the *Four Zoas* which echoes both the final plate of *Jerusalem* and his vision on Felpham beach, Blake includes a simile that offers a glimpse of *how* one's vision might expand beyond the constricted outline of a singular body:

As the seed waits Eagerly watching for its flower & fruit
Anxious its little soul [...]
So Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & beast
Collecting up the scatterd portions of his immortal body¹⁴⁰

This extended, intricate simile suggests that the vital "ingredient"—the *how* by which merely seeing becomes a constitutive, transformative vision—resides in the seed's willingness to inhabit the dissipation of its current form; to undergo, if the conditions are ripe, the drastically material changes and exchanges that enable its current seedy body to disappear into a flower and then again into a fruit. But if the plant's transformations can be visible to a patient external observer across time, Blake suggests that the human vision of our own transformations operates across space, by recognizing our former and future forms in what he calls the "immortal body." Immortality, in this sense, is not the perpetuation of an ossified form—again, the logic of the pyramid—but the contagion between bodies that confers form, our own bodies and brains included. For if all human infants "became what [they] behold" by unconsciously wiring their unfinished brains to their environment (the "highest capacity for producing similarities" that Walter Benjamin marvels of the human child who mimics "even windmills and trains"),¹⁴¹ Blake suggests that the potency of mimetic observation can be taken a step further: we can develop the capacity to *recognize* sources of our sense of self which lie outside our bodily outlines and limited identifications.¹⁴² In *The Book of Thel*, Thel tells the nonhuman inhabitants of the vale: "I fear that I am not like thee."¹⁴³ The likeness that she fears she lacks is the very capacity for change without fear, to accept the dissolution of material form that she keenly recognizes change inevitably entails. For the human who can truly see with the seed's eagerness for substantial change, beholding our becomings is paradigm-shifting, as a gathering by

which one recognizes the extension of one's body beyond both our bodily outline and our possessiveness that extends that outline through our sense of what we can rightly control and command. In this sense, the act of "collecting up the scattered portions" Blake associates with visionary observation stands in stark contrast to the specimen-hoarding and ecological destruction enacted by colonial eyes and hands, for it enables Man to see *what is already afoot*, already a part of him in the profundity of its unseen influence on his own body. The dilation of time that Blake attributes to the poetic moment thus is accompanied by the thickening of space that characterizes visions: as if in seeing what exists *now*, one begin to catch sight of the series of forms that existed prior to this one—and that will continue to evolve as the current form of the I erodes, "we who are but for a time & who pass away."¹⁴⁴ The expanding eye sees the expansion of its own form, which is simultaneously the erosion of itself as self-contained entity, as material transformations across time and space. But, crucially, the *truth* of what the eye observes is dependent upon the mind's willingness to inhabit the deformation of one's singular outline. A self-annihilation of the abstraction that we have internalized as our form of embodiment, which that modernity calls personhood.

*

How do we notice the sand in our eyes? For is all too easy to wax poetic on these expansive and illuminating moments when visionary transformation arrives with a clear-cut sense of opening and growth. But for Blake, visions operate most powerfully—at once brightening and blinding—when the eyes are assaulted by what they cannot see through. In a short poem in his notebooks, Blake writes:

Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau
Mock on Mock on! tis all in vain!
You throw the sand against the wind
and the wind blows it back again

And every sand becomes a Gem
Reflected in the beams divine
Blown back they blind the mocking Eye
But still in Israel's paths they shine¹⁴⁵

What is the difference between the grit one tries to rub out of the eyes and the elusive gem of truth that presumably even philosophers such as Rousseau and Voltaire seek? Blake implies that for the philosophers, those for whom truth is true when it stirs the soul rather than aggravate the body, the obstacle is not the material irritation of the sand, but a failure to see the sand as a gem. "So soon we love this world," writes fellow poet Claudia Rankine, "so soon we are willing to coexist with dust in our eyes."¹⁴⁶ For Blake, the irritants in the eyes do not only teach coexistence but create an aperture—one to "shew you," as a playful fairy promises in *Europe*, "all alive the world / where every particle of dust breathes forth its joy."¹⁴⁷

How does one *see* the vitality of the world such that even inanimate objects are imbued with joy? Blake suggests that "every sand becomes a Gem" not through transubstantiation into immaterial substance, but through training the interoceptive eye to work with the irritation of sand itself. For Blake's complex and demanding sense of beholding marks not only the shift in vision—but also, slipperier still, as Wittgenstein notes, the cultivated perceptive ability to *notice* that subtle shift as it occurs. In Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Oothoon points to this subtle capacity of perceptive ken to observe itself in action. "Does his eye behold the beam that brings / Expansion to the eye of pity?"¹⁴⁸ The question recalls the biblical parable in Matthew 7:3: "why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but not the beam in thine own eye?" Here the beam refers to a

plank of wood, an opaque body that obscures vision by blocking the light rays but is itself unseen.¹⁴⁹ Blake's subtle and sly revision, however, radically changes the paradigm of sight. His question carefully smudges the distinction between the beam of light that enables vision and the wooden beam that blocks it, for the "mild beam [that] blots" does not obscure some transcendental, immaterial illumination of divine light but, instead, enables perceptual expansion to occur. Even as Blake locates inner illumination in the interoceptive act he calls "pity"—the "tendernesses of the soul" lost when "minute particulars harden"—the quote nonetheless also implies that the expansion of the eye is triggered by how it receives the discomforting object that blocks its view.¹⁵⁰

In the biblical parable, external vision relates to the insight of self-observation only through a metaphor that links two presumably disconnected events: divine illumination has nothing to do with our eyeballs. In this quote, however (exemplifying a recurring tendency in Blake's works) the perceptive capacities of the external eye that functions through our vulnerable eyeball is literally—that is, interoceptively—linked to what Blake calls the "inward vision" that both *is* and *beholds* the "Human Form Divine."

Blake insists that beholding leads to communal being, but *how* it does so matters profoundly. The passage from Matthew seeks to make the oblivious "thou" aware of his own hypocrisy through a deflationary comparison to "thy brother" ("your beam is bigger than his mote!"). Yet this tactic of turning the tables on judgement relies on the same comparative techniques that it exposes and excoriates. For Blake, however, the problem with envy, jealousy, and hypocrisy resides in the very perceptive spirit that sees another person as a separate entity to whom the self is being compared, favorably or unfavorably. In this sense, the observational scrutiny through which the biblical speaker singles out the "thou" for condemnation and correction only exacerbates the problem by extending that sense of segregation under the guise of moral correction.¹⁵¹ The expansion "to the eye of pity" that Blake offers instead is a mode of seeing deeply into the material makeup of bodies. It begins, sometimes literally, with a visceral reaction to the sand in our eyes, and it triggers an unsettling of ontological distinction between bodies that undergirds any comparative framework. Beholding, for Blake, is simultaneously an everyday act of "sensual improvement" and a spiritual practice, for its cultivation enables cacophonous bodies which erroneously believe themselves to be discrete entities to self-coordinate into the communal form that he calls a body.

The Divine Vision

Despite the breathless discoveries in neuroscience over the past three decades that are widening the chasm between *how* vision is constructed by the brain and *what* we (think) see when we look out into what we presume to be a shareable vision of the world—many neuroscientists nonetheless assume that our default modes of seeing are inevitable. We erroneously yet intuitively subscribe to a camera obscura paradigm of sensory perception that the neurological evidence flatly contradicts. (Anthropologists and art historians—as we'll explore later—might balk at this assumption to remind us that *our* default sensibilities are vastly different from those of other cultures less steeped in Newtonian assumptions of clock time and empty space). From the standpoint of a Western, modern mind whose sense of space and time—as Blake bemoans—is bounded by Newtonian coordinates, consciousness cannot penetrate the inner workings of sight (or any other sense organ) using its own mental powers. Emphasizing the gap between experiencing mind and brain that generates experience as the paradox of consciousness, many Western neuroscientists assume that the opaqueness of our sight to its own modus operandi can only be prosthetically and partially re-mediated through the progress of scientific knowledge, whose field reports on the astonishing operations of our organs further distance us from actual bodily experience of them.

For all that, Blake presciently warns us against expecting our sensory gates to provide unmediated access to reality, for he has grander ambitions than nihilistically deflating the testimony of the senses. If he sounds like a neuroscientist emphasizing the "brain is a black box" when he observes that "man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern," he further claims the senses are capable of reaching perceptive liberation: "if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite."¹⁵² Blake's most challenging claims are nonetheless at the heart of his work: like meditators and monks, he insists that the interoceptive awareness he calls "inward vision" can be cultivated to behold itself—to viscerally observe in real time minute particulars of its material workings *from the inside*. As the internal eye changes with the development of its observational capacity, Blake further claims that our relationship with the so-called external world is also transformed, becoming "prophetic" in his specific sense. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, his version of the biblical prophet Isaiah declares: "I saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing."¹⁵³ If, paradoxically, this language of *sensing* infinity, eternity, divinity sounds abstract or simply nonsensical in a secular world that is no longer capable of seeing spirits or comprehending forms of agency outside of those we attribute to our own humanity, Blake insists that the loss of this capacity—at once individual and cultural—is precisely part of his point.

Blake's epic poems, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*, and the unilluminated *Four Zoas*, unspool various pathways toward restoring this capacity by teaching his reader how to behold what he calls "The Divine Vision."¹⁵⁴ Recent Blake scholars, ever cautious of losing analytical footing as we wade into the mysticism of his late works, often sidestep his esoteric claims or blunt the strangeness of his visions by turning them into blueprints for building an alternative body politic to those troubled configurations so dominant in our culture. Although such interpretations aptly amplify Blake's scalding critique of the individualism underpinning modern community, they nonetheless effectively erase his crucial term by reinterpreting the divine vision as a utopian heuristic. But what makes vision *divine* for Blake is no more and no less than the keenly intimate awareness of the shifting, subtle—and unseen, if uncultivated—relationships that make up a world, a body, that constitute consciousness itself. And there is no substitute for learning how to see it with one's own internal eyes. Blake insists that the external body politic he calls for remains merely utopic—*nowhere*,¹⁵⁵ an abstract and regulating ideal that, like Urizen, inevitably becomes repressive despite its best intentions towards liberation—unless the self that seeks to participate in constituting that communal body can begin to internally observe its own constitution.

In *Milton* and especially *Jerusalem*, Blake's "divine vision" that unites perceptive acumen with communal embodiment takes a curiously quotidian and banal, almost anti-modern, form: the family:

He who would see the Divinity must see him in his Children
One first, in friendship & love; then a Divine Family & in the midst
Jesus will appear; so he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole
Must see it in its Minute Particulars; Organized¹⁵⁶

But if Blake fervently embraces Jesus Christ at the heart of his divine vision, his instructions for how to behold "a Vision" radically departs from the Christian mode of vision famously enshrined in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man I put

away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then, face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.¹⁵⁷

Even as Blake's "divine family" draws obvious inspiration from Christianity's triune God, the precise constellation that makes its coordination divine is almost a point-by-point inversion of Paul's eschatologically-oriented vision. The Corinthians passage offers a series of inversions, many of which feel intuitive to the Western mind because its far-ranging influence has shaped how our minds conceive the contours of their own understanding. Each Pauline inversion serves to highlight the contrast, even incompatibility, between the partiality of our present condition with the wholeness of a future state: the imperfection implicit to the "part" is "done away" by the arrival of "that which is perfect," and the child's limited speech and understanding are replaced ("put away") by the obvious superiority of adult rationality. This structural repetition, ingrained in the passage's crucial points, subtly shape how the mind conceives of space and time. Spatially, "part" is defined by its very imperfection, such that the final arrival of Perfection is the inevitable annihilation of the part, subsumed into the Whole. Temporally, the *now* in which the "I" resides is both segregated from and the antithesis of the mysterious *then*—located beyond this life—in which divine knowledge promises to posthumously illuminate human understanding. The Pauline vision of vision emphasizes that one cannot behold Eternity except as the negation of the here and now.

For Blake—whose celebration of the *human form divine* can be read as a joyous rejection of the eschatological veil that separates partial human knowledge from inscrutable divine knowing—Paul got both the form and the starting point of vision wrong. Worse still, that misperception brings a devastating set of epistemological consequences for how his intellectual and spiritual descendants understand their mental powers and formations of sensory perception. Blake's attentiveness to the peculiar keenness of a child's partial understanding, as well as his insistence on honoring infant knowledge, so deeply inflects his work that he insists some of his best readers are children.¹⁵⁸ The very separation of the divine and eternal from earthly ken (which Paul takes as the proper attitude of humility that prepares us for God's future perfection of our limited sight in the afterlife) is instead for Blake symptomatic of and further perpetuates the fall from the perceptive acumen in *this* life. For Blake, the divine knowledge that Paul defers to the future perfect *then* is not separated from the *now* by mortality or time, but rather hidden in our ability—yet to be cultivated—to behold the present moment fully, pulsing in our own arteries. Although for both Blake and Paul, the simultaneity of seeing and knowing is what makes for a vision, they diverge profoundly on what it *means* to see and know. The partiality of human ken encapsulated by Paul's metaphor "now we see through a glass, darkly" resonates far beyond any explicitly Christian sphere. Cropped from its original Corinthian framework that emphasizes "faith, hope, and charity," the phrase has become a humanist mandate even for those who do not believe in divine eschatological perfection but rather set future perfection as the heuristic vanishing point toward which our present efforts infinitely strive.¹⁵⁹ The glass, darkly, is now a stand-alone proclamation of the limitations of human ken, built into the human perceptive organs themselves. But the potency of metaphors is that they subtly impart paradigms which shape how the inner and outer eyes see. Perpetuating one of the most influential metaphors in the Western history of sight even prior to Locke's camera obscura, "the glass, darkly" suggests that the object through which we see is a mediating obstruction which must be dematerialized before vision can be perfected in its absence. The body itself must disappear before truth can appear—hence, the impossibility of its full presence in this merely mortal life.

For Blake, however, disdaining or removing the part does not upgrade us some greater perfection beyond it; instead, "he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole, must see it in its Minute Particulars." Orienting us towards the particular and concrete, Blake's "minute particular" replaces *both* the part and the perfect in the Pauline vision. Eternity is not the final reward awaiting

the faithful at the end of time, for it exists fully as practical insight to skillfully navigate the here and now. It lives "in the midst" of ordinary entanglements through which every body is constellated into being through its relationship with other bodies—if only we can learn to see it as such.

The difficulty, Blake endlessly reiterates, is actually *beholding* this everyday vision of the entanglement of our bodies and brains so profoundly and precisely that it can transform our actions and habits. In a crucial moment in *Jerusalem*, as Albion is about to storm off, Blake's Jesus attempts to bring him back with glimpse of this vision:

Turning from Universal Love petrific as [Albion] went,
His cold against the warmth of Eden rag'd with loud
Thunders of deadly war (the fever of the human soul)
Fires and clouds of rolling smoke! but mild the Saviour
Displaying the Eternal Vision! the Divine Similitude!
In loves and tears of brothers, sisters, sons, fathers,
Which if Man ceases to behold, he ceases to exist:

Saying. Albion! Our wars are wars of life, & wounds of love,
With intellectual spears, & long winged arrows of thought:
Mutual in one another's love and wrath all renewing
We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
We behold multitude; or expanding; we behold as one
As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
We call Jesus the Christ; and he in us, and we in him
Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life
Giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses.¹⁶⁰

Neither composed of individuals nor constitutive of a public sphere of mediated communications among independent adults, Blake's "Divine Family" is an ever-shifting constellation of bodily, emotional, and mental entanglement such that the perception of each—even before and without the meditations of language—transforms and coordinates the perceptions of others. In one sense, this vision of communal being that Blake calls the "divine family" is perhaps closer to the shared sensitivity that coordinates a flock of migrating birds. They move in unison because each subtly and immediately adjusts to the dictations of the others' movements. Yet in another sense, for the self to be coordinated into being by other bodies is simply what it means to belong to *any* family: to participate, consciously or unconsciously, in a cultural milieu such that bodily habits and the contours of perceptive awareness transfer through mimicry so potent and intimate that we habitually fail to recognize its workings in ourselves. Families matter as the first and most influential milieu that shape the perceptive ken of each developing eye. That long period during which our tender bodies and brains were utterly dependent upon the intimate care of others is profoundly formative of who and how we are now. Prior to any selfhood that could substantiate its claim of independence, our habits, thoughts, proclivities, identity, our very sense of being is so steeped in the embodied and enculturated milieu of the family that we "became what [we] beheld."¹⁶¹ Modern, Western personhood, however, is founded upon an alternative storyline—one that that sequesters or shrinks familial history into *prehistory* to locate our sense of agency in self-fashioning. In the one of the most influential works of modernity, *Paradise Lost*, Satan justifies his rebellion by shrugging off this immemorial past in which the tender self is forged through its intimate transactions with other bodies. Because he and his fellow angels—like almost all humans—cannot remember the earliest period of their own material making, because "we know no time when we were not as now," Satan

sweeps this unremembered history under the rug to declare himself "self-begot, self-rai'd / By our own quickening power."¹⁶²

In the *Jerusalem* passage (also repeated in *the Four Zoas*), Blake works to undo Satan's fiat of forgetting and disrupt the self-begotten paradigm of personhood by distilling his "Divine Vision" in that old-fashioned constellation of family. Beholding is a family affair: how we see is attuned by how other the initiate and aggravating bodies around us have—mostly unconsciously—taught us to see. But what makes this family "divine" (and what inverts Satan's declaration of self-begetting) is that its members *do* remember their own communal constitution. For the making of the divine family—like the coordination that animates and sustains all bodies—is not the one-time-only spectacle of birth, but is constantly happening in the present tense, even amidst the present tensions: "wars of life & wounds of love / with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought." Blake takes care to emphasize that the coordination by which the Divine Family *knows* and *is* itself does not mark the absence of agitation, but is often experienced *as* agitation. If there is "perfect harmony," it isn't because they have achieved perfect consensus or unanimous agreement, but because they've learned how to deftly navigate the inevitable internal collisions and abrasions by "giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses." Even for "the divine family," this vital remembrance of its own constitution can itself be transitory and fitful: "for contracting our infinite senses / we behold as multitude, expanding we behold as one," and thus require constant "renewing." Blake's crucial term, beholding, knits together awareness *that* one is an expanded body with the expansive sensory perception of "infinite senses." Remembrance can only truly move the body to "live as one man" when the knowledge of its own constitution fully saturates consciousness—animating habits and habitus beneath conscience awareness—to transform how one beholds and holds oneself in relationship to others. In its keenest moments of self-awareness, the Divine Family sees and knows that a body is always also a body part. Each body is both made up of other bodies and contributes towards materially (if often invisibly) towards the embodiment of others. For opaque bodies, the contribution of others often becomes sensible to one's own body only in the acute moments of agitation. Simultaneously, coordination withinside any seemingly individual body is only possible if a body can sense and aptly respond to its own internal signals, which itself is an interpretation of and response to its external milieu.

Albion's rejection of the "Divine Vision" further highlights the specific challenge for the human mind ("in the fever of the human soul"), clouded by "fires and clouds of rolling smoke" and "thunders of deadly war," to recognize the profundity of its internal and external entanglements. The gap between modern adult human consciousness and the brain-body structures which support its mostly hidden operations means that the mind can—especially when "petrifyd" and "cold"—evade the awareness of the body and lose visceral sensitivity to its interpenetration with other bodies. And, as Jesus courts Albion to join the party, the divine family isn't limited to the magical number three; entrance into this family is predicated upon neither identity nor essence, but the ability to behold its vision, to see it—oneself! —with one's inner eye in the minute particularity of one's current and concrete circumstances. "To behold as one," then, is not to erase distinctions or smudge accidents into an unvariegated Essence, but to observe and recognize the subtle, dense webs of entanglement that materially constitute each being, whose visceral, often agitating presence in our own bodies belies our claim of self-begetting.

This passage emphasizes what is at stake in our ability to hold this vision, "which if Man ceases to behold, he ceases to exist." Who is the "he" in this sentence? Grammatically, "which" points two lines earlier to suggest that the "the eternal vision! the Divine Similitude!" that exists through felt and unfelt material transactions between bodies ("in loves and tears of brothers, sisters, sons, fathers") depends upon human participation in the act of beholding. For the "Divine Similitude" is not the image of some holy face that can save the singular soul that gazes reverently

upon it, but is itself the sensing and signaling between seemingly discrete parts that maintain the homeostatic vitality of every body. But the line itself, reinforced by its simple parallelism, also cuts through the crust of selfhood to emphasize the impact on the self-begotten individual: "if man ceases to behold, he *himself* also ceases to exist" (emphasis added). For although our "vital dehiscence"—as Lacan puts it—is real in our minds, it is illusory in this world of entangled embodiment. The segregation by which we falsely exclude ourselves (or feel ourselves excluded) from the delicate, dense strands of ecological connections that sustain the homeostatic vitality of each species—including our own—is now threatening to destroy us all. If the dire urgency of this claim (like the repeated "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation!" through *Milton*)¹⁶³ made no sense to Blake's contemporaries in the early nineteenth century as "dark Satanic mills" blotted the skies and polluted the waters of Blake's native London, perhaps after two centuries of increasingly obvious ecological devastation wrought by separatist paradigms of selfhood, we are better positioned to grasp his urgency.¹⁶⁴ Crucially, however, Blake's depiction of the "divine family" does not offer ethical instructions for a new moral code, but rather imparts an embodied epistemology lesson on how to truly observe our ontological condition. It is a cry, on the verge of an apocalyptic disaster that he foresaw in its embryonic stages, for humans to behold what we are beholden to our very material, pulsing, earthly existence.

If *beholding* is the act of observing the subtle connections withinside a seemingly singular entity that enables its vitality in relation to others, the very fact of our opakeness—that most of us do not behold our inner workings nor truly see our bodies entangled with others—seems to belie Blake's stark warning that "if Man ceases to behold he ceases to exist."¹⁶⁵ Two centuries later, we're still around! Many scientists, scholars, and researchers, and therapists further suggest (inadvertently echoing Nietzsche's warning against peering down the crack in the chamber of consciousness) that our day-to-day lack of awareness about what bodies and brains are up to most of the time is not just inevitable, but salutary. In this sense, there exists a deep contradiction between the planetary need for our species to learn to observe our ontological condition and a local health prohibition, at the level of individual well-being, against looking deeply into our material constitution. As David Eagleman puts it, "almost the entirety of what happens in your mental life is not under your conscious control, and the truth is its better this way. Consciousness can take all the credit it wants, but it's best left at the sidelines for most of the decision making that cranks along in the brain."¹⁶⁶ But although Blake knows that for most people and homeostatic operations are "opaque", he enjoins us to "search & see, turn your eyes inward: open O thou lovely World / of Love and Harmony: expand thy ever lovely Gates."¹⁶⁷ What does beholding our visceral internal world *do* that Blake deems so vital for our existence? And what is Blake even talking about when he instructs us to "behold the Divine Vision. Open / the Center into an Expanse"?¹⁶⁸

From the perspective of Newtonian geometry, the expansion of the internal human body is definitively finite. Although pregnancy, obesity, some cancers, and a large or infelicitous meal can extend and distend the circumference of our abdomens, the physical expansion visible to the external eye is puny—especially when compared with, say, the astonishing morphological power that transforms larvae into butterflies emerging from their cocoons. But Blake's reminder that "the Eye of Man" is "a little narrow orb closd up Scarcely beholding the great light" points beyond the readily identified anatomical organ towards the deep and diffuse interoceptive operations that make up a more complex and expansive sense of seeing.¹⁶⁹ For Blake, expansion of the inward eye does not occur through territorial enlargement, but rather via honing awareness of the minute particularities of embodied experience: the interoceptive *feelings* that frame and shape sensory perception. What expands and contracts from moment to moment isn't internal space in the Newtonian sense (or in any way that would be visible to the "microscope & telescope" of Blake's day), but rather

interoceptive sensitivity—the "inward eye"—that enables one to peer into that internal space. Contrary to the widespread Western assumption that our internal bodies are "fix'd opake without internal light," Blake insists that the visceral internal world can be illuminated by *cultivating* interoceptive sensitivity, opening awareness onto the expansive and intricate parts within parts that make up a body.¹⁷⁰

When Eagleman declares that consciousness is better left outside the brain's black box, or when Wapner points out the paradox of interception that only "unconscious signals are the trustworthy ones," the worry is this: if opaqueness were to be removed, consciousness—which they largely assume to be synonymous with thinking and deliberation—would not be able to skillfully manage what it encounters in the body.¹⁷¹ Allowed to seize control of our own automatic homeostatic functions, the conscious *I* would misinterpret crucial signals or otherwise screw it up.¹⁷² But for Blake, the inward expansion of the inward eye of interoceptive *feeling* is dependent upon our very ability to cede control. In a radical reversal of the psychoanalytic imperative to make the unconscious conscious as cognitive content that lends itself to self-expression, Blake instead calls on his readers to move in the opposite direction: his prophecies teach consciousness how to sink into typically unconscious activities by learning to observe—*just observe*—what operates beneath its habitual threshold of command and control. And yet if the conscious task is simply to observe, Blake nonetheless insists that cultivating this capacity for inner observation actively yokes the mind to the body-brain such that consciousness becomes more responsive to bodily dictates—including, as his opening invocation to the muses in *Milton* might remind us, poetic inspiration itself as a spiritual act of receiving bodily dictations. To *behold* entails being beholden to the polyvalent sensing and signaling between body and brain, most of which is only sensible once the monologue of the mind has quieted, to feel that increasingly subtle somatic tugs and tethers are guiding instructions rather than bonds to transcend.

¹ "Behold" and its variations--beholder, beholding--occurs at least 175 times throughout Blake's extant prose and poetry. You can view all of them by searching under [behold*] in the *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, available online on *The Blake Archive*: <https://erdman.blakearchive.org/>

² William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly revised (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), plate 5, E 147. Unless otherwise noted, all further Blake citations are from this edition. In most cases, citations will include the plate number followed by the page number in Erdman: J 5, E 147.

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1953), 212e.

⁴ David Eagleman, *Livewired: The Inside Story of the Ever-Changing Brain*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2021), 69. This is a basic tenet of contemporary neuroscience. Feldman makes a similar--and explicitly anti-Lockean point--when she observes, that external "sensations seem to sail right into your head as if your eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and skin were transparent windows on to the world. But you don't sense with your sensory organs. You sense with your brain" (7 1/2 *Lessons*, 70.)

⁵ See David Eagleman, *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011). "For those of us with a lifetime of sight, the best way to appreciate the fact that vision is a construction is by noticing how often our visual systems get it wrong. Visual illusions exist at the edges of what our system has evolved to handle, and as such they serve as a powerful window into the brain" (23).

⁶ See Eagleman, *Livewired*, 129. Also consider the phenomenon of "blindspotting"--where a blind person can *guess* (much more accurately than chance) the shape of an object that her damaged visual cortex cannot actually see. Describing the livewire potential of brain plasticity, Eagleman writes, "any patch of the [brain] cortex is pluripotent--meaning that it has the potential to develop into a variety of fates, depending on what's plugged into it" (66). Hence, with adequate training and/or apparatus, visual information can be produced in the brain through other senses, such as skin conductors or (in well documented cases of humans who use echolocation to navigate), auditory organ. "Because inputs to the brain--photons at the eyes, air compression waves at the ears, pressure on the skin--are all converted into the common currency of electric signals [...] the brain will learn how to interpret it" (65). In one study he cites, scientists "redirected inputs from a ferret's eye to the auditory cortex so that now the *auditory* cortex

received *visual* data. What happened? The auditory cortex adjusted its circuitry to resemble the connections of the primary visual cortex. The rewired animals interpreted inputs to the auditory cortex like normal vision. This tells us that the pattern of inputs determines the fate of the cortex. The brain dynamically wires itself to best represent (and eventually act upon) whatever data come swimming in." (67)

⁷ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 44, 45, 44. Eagleman's description of "Anton's syndrome, a disorder in which a stroke renders a patient blind--and the patient *denies* her blindness"--offers a helpful example of the extent to which sight is generated by the brain and continues to be perpetuated (albeit without corrective data) even after optic nerves no longer function effectively:

A doctor will say, "Mrs. Johnson, how many fingers am I holding up?" She'll say, "while in fact he is holding up none. When he asks, "What color is my shirt?" She'll tell him that it is while when it is blue. Those with Anton's syndrome are not *pretending* that they are not blind; they truly believe they are not blind. Instead, they are experiencing what they take to be vision, but it is all internally generated. Often, a patient with Anton's syndrome will not seek medical attention for a little while after the stroke, because she has no idea she is blind. It is only after bumping into enough furniture and walls that she begins to feel that something is amiss. While the patient's answers seem bizarre, they can be understood as her internal model: the external data is not getting to the right places because of the stroke, and the patient's reality is simply that which is generated by the brain, which little attachment to the real world. In this sense, what she experiences is no different from dreaming, drug trips, or hallucinations." (*Incognito*, 50-51).

⁸ Ibid, 45.

⁹ Consider Eagleman's description of *anosognosia*, "which describes a total lack of awareness about an impairment" such as when "a patient [...] completely denies their very obvious paralysis" (*Incognito* 135). He describes the case of Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglass, who, ever being "paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair, nonetheless declared himself to be fine and "claimed to be kicking football field goals with his paralyzed side." (*Incognito* 135). Eagleman writes, "[i]t's not that Justice Douglas was *lying*--his brain actually believed he could move just fine. These fabrications illustrate the lengths to which the brain will go to put together a coherent narrative" (135).

¹⁰ Barrett, *7 1/2 Lessons*, 71.

¹¹ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 48. Also see Feldman: "when your predicting brain is right, it creates your reality. When its wrong, it still creates your reality and hopefully it learns from its mistakes" (*7 1/2 Lessons*, 76).

¹² In the preface to *Milton*, Blake writes, "the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration" (*Milton* 1, *E* 95). Blake frequently associates ratio with memory ("a Ratio of the things of Memory" [*E* 220]...a Ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory [*E* 124]), but insists--not unlike twenty-first century neuroscientists--that its scope is not limited to reminiscing, but is actively at work in constructing sensory-perception: "If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again" (*Milton* 2, *E* 3).

¹³ *MHH* 14, *E* 39.

¹⁴ From the *The Everlasting Gospel* plate e, *E* 524:

The Vision of Christ that thou dost see
Is my Visions Greatest Enemy
Thine has a great hook nose like thine
Mine has a snub nose like to mine
Thine is the Friend of All Mankind
Mine speaks in parables to the Blind
Thine loves the same world that mine hates
Thy Heaven doors are my Hells Gates [...]
Both read the Bible day & night
But thou readest black where I read white.

¹⁵ *MHH* 20, *E* 42. "But I am happy to find a Great Majority of Fellow Mortals who can Elucidate My Visions & Particularly they have been Elucidated by Children who have taken a greater delight in contemplating my Pictures than I even hoped. Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity Some Children are Fools & so are some Old Men. But There is a vast Majority on the side of Imagination or Spiritual Sensation." Blake's letter to Dr. Trusler, Lambeth, August 23, 1799. *E* 703.

¹⁶ Ibid, *E* 702.

¹⁷ Ibid, 702.

¹⁸ Consider Damasio's title: *The Strange Order of Things*. Or the subtitle(s) to both Barrett and Eagleman's books: "The Secret Life of the Brain" (Barrett) and "The Secret Lives of the Brain" (Eagleman). Here's a sampling from Barrett's description of prediction: "I realize that this description defies common sense, but wait: there's more" [...] "here's the final nail in the coffin of common sense" (7 1/2 *Lessons*, 72, 76). Eagleman adopts a similarly tone in describing the disconnect between how sensory-perception intuitively appears to most of us and how it actually works, according to neuroscientists: "Intuition suggests that you open your eyes and voila: there's the world, with all its beautiful reds and golds, dogs and taxicabs, bustling cities and floriferous landscapes. Vision appears effortless and, with minor exceptions, accurate. There is little important difference, it might seem, between your eyes and a high resolution digital video camera. For that matter, your ears seem like compact microphones that accurately record the sounds of the world, and your fingertips appear to detect the three-dimensional shape of objects in the outside world. What intuition suggests is dead wrong." (*Incognito*, 21)

¹⁹ Neuroscientists frequently emphasize the "black box" of the brain. Feldman writes, "From the moment you're born to the moment you draw your last breath, your brain is stuck in a dark, silent box called your skull" (7 1/2 *Lessons*, 75). Eagleman writes, "Your brain is encased in absolute blackness in the vault of your skull. It doesn't *see* anything. All it knows are those little signals, and nothing else. And yet you perceive the world in all shades of brightness and colors. Your brain is in the dark but your mind constructs light." (*Incognito* 40).

²⁰ *Milton* 41, E 142.

²¹ Oliver Sacks, *Hallucinations* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), xiv.

²² The fuzziest "edge" of our vision may be what we fail to see at the very center of our vision. Eagleman describes how "any image that remains permanently fixed in one position on the retina will become invisible" (*Livewired*, 164). For example, "you have blood vessels that sit on top of your retina, at the back of your eye. This weblike retinal vasculature *should* be seen superimposed on top of everything you look at, because it's smack in front of your photoreceptors. However, it is totally invisible to your perception. [...] No matter how many movements your eyes make, they are never "refreshing" the image of these blood vessels. Even though the vessels impose themselves between you and the world, they perceptually disappear like a magic trick." (165)

²³ Sacks, *Hallucinations*, 200.

²⁴ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 45.

²⁵ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 46.

²⁶ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 23.

²⁷ E 565. For a detailed description of how visual perception works, see Eagleman's "The Testimony of the Senses" in *The Incognito Brain*, 20-54. He concludes: "we are aware of very little of what is 'out there.' The brain makes time-saving and resource-saving assumptions and tries to see the world only as well as it needs to. As we realize that we are not conscious of most things until we ask ourselves questions about them, we have taken the first step in the journey of self-examination. We see that what we perceive in the outside world is generated by parts of the brain to which we do not have access." (54)

²⁸ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 52. Damasio discusses the same phenomenon in *The Strange Order of Things*: "....thanks to this integrative operation, we can, for example, see a person whose lips are moving and simultaneously hear sounds that are synchronized to the movement of the lips" (88).

²⁹ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 53.

³⁰ E 520.

³¹ Oliver Sacks calls this skill "insight." describing Charles Bonnet Syndrome, where the patient sees sometimes extremely vivid hallucinations which illusory status they recognize, Sacks writes, "one of the defining features of Charles Bonnet hallucinations is the preservation of insight, the realization that a hallucination is not real. People with CBS are occasionally deceived by a hallucination, especially if it is plausible and contextually appropriate. But such mistakes are quickly realized to be as such, and insight is restored. The hallucinations of CBS almost never lead to persistent false ideas or delusions." (28)

³² E 565-6.

³³ "Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have <curbed &> governed their Passions or have No Passions but because they have Cultivated their Understandings" (*A Vision of the Last Judgment* 87, E 564).

³⁴ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 195.

³⁵ Barrett, 7 1/2 *Lessons*, 25.

³⁶ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 193.

³⁷ For more on prosthetics that reroute or bypass sensory organs, see chapters 4 & 5 of David Eagleman's *Livewired*.

³⁸ Eagleman, *Livewired*, 133.

³⁹ *Milton* 29, E 127.

⁴⁰ See Kevis Goodman's discussion of "the microscopic eye" as the spectator's vulnerability to the object under observation. *"The Microscopic Eye and the Noise of History,"* in *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004). However, within the epistemic framework of enlightenment philosophy, the microscopic eye can only *cancel* knowledge with porous vulnerability, that vulnerability does not itself become a form of knowledge except *via negativa*.

⁴¹ *J* 91, *E* 251.

⁴² Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2017), 63-4.

⁴³ "[N]oception [pain] and thermoreception are aspects of interoception, not exteroception, because they report aspects of the physiological condition of the body conveyed by small-diameter sensory fibers and the spinothalamic pathway to the interoceptive cortex. The research in this book demonstrates that feelings of pain and temperature are based on activity in body maps that occupy specific portions of interoceptive cortex." A. D. (Bud) Craig, *How do you Feel? An Interoceptive Moment with your Neurobiological Self* (Princeton UP, 2015).

⁴⁴ "Affective touch is an interoceptive modality, and it subserves homeostasis not only at the level of the individual but also at the level of the social community[...] Instead of guiding skeletal motor adjustments, affective touch communicates social emotional and modulates the homeostatic well-being of the individual and the group. Affective touch epitomizes the fundamental distinction between interoceptive and exteroceptive feelings." (Craig, *How Do You Feel?* 173, 174).

⁴⁵ Goldstein, *Sweet Science*, 62.

⁴⁶ Object 1, *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*. London, 1793, c. 1818. Available on *The William Blake Archive* <https://www.blakearchive.org/copy/gates-sexes.b?descId=gates-sexes.b.illbk.01>

⁴⁷ Maybe cite *The Light Eaters* speculation that the vein action in plants are a sort of proto-brain!

⁴⁸ *Milton* 28, *E* 126.

⁴⁹ Blake, Letter to Tusler, *E* 703. *J* 39, *E* 187.

⁵⁰ *MHH* 4, *E* 34; *All Religions are One* 2, *E* 1

⁵¹ *J* 83, *E* 241. Also see Goldstein's reading of this scene in *Sweet Science*, 46.

⁵² *E* 16.

⁵³ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 38.

⁵⁴ "You have blood vessels that sit on top of the retina, at the back of your eye. This website retinal vasculature *should* be seen superimposed on top of everything you look at, because it's smack in front of your photoreceptors. However, it's totally invisible to your perception" because it "is fixed in position with respect to the retina. No matter how many little movements your eyes make, they are never "refreshing" the image of these blood vessels. Even though the vessels interpose themselves between you and your world, they perceptually disappear like a magic trick." (Eagleman, *Livewired*, 165).

Maybe go into a discussion of modernity and boredom, alongside Eagleman's observation that the brain only sees what *changes* in its field of view.

⁵⁵ Barrett, 7 1/2 *Lessons About the Brain*, 50-57.

⁵⁶ Quote adapted from two lines on *J* 65, *E* 217 and *J* 65, *E* 218.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the research history of adult neuroplasticity, see: Eberhard Fuchs, Gabriele Flügge, "Adult Neuroplasticity: More than 40 Years of Research," *Neural Plasticity*, vol. 2014 (May 2014).

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4026979>. This lack of neuroplasticity was first described by Santiago Ramón y Cajal who stated that "In adult centers the nerve paths are something fixed, ended, immutable. Everything may die, nothing may be regenerated. It is for science of the future to change, if possible, this harsh decree" Cajal RS, *Degeneration and Regeneration of the Nervous System*, May RT, ed. R. T May, vol. 2, (New York: Hafner, 1959).

⁵⁸ See *Milton* 16, *E* 107. Also see *Jerusalem* 31, *E* 177.

⁵⁹ *Milton* 29, *E* 128.

⁶⁰ Eagleman writes "human babies are born with few built-in skills and a great deal of plasticity, while adults have mastered specific tasks at the expense of flexibility. There's a trade-off between adaptability and efficiency: as your brain gets good at certain jobs, it becomes less able to tackle others." (*Livewired*, 193)

⁶¹ *M* 13, *E* 107.

⁶² *Milton* 31, *E* 177.

⁶³ *Milton* 9, *E* 103.

⁶⁴ Image from *Milton: A Poem*, copy D, printed 1818.

<https://blakearchive.org/copy/milton.d?descId=milton.d.illbk.10>

⁶⁵ In another retelling of the fall from *The [First] Book of Urizen*, Blake also emphasizes the *felt* sense of opacity: "the inhabitants of these cities felt their nerves change into marrow and the hardening Bones began." (*Urizen* 25, E 82).

⁶⁶ *Milton* 28, E 126; *Milton* 10, E 104,

⁶⁷ The *how* for Blake is a strangeness that does not estrange. In Blake's annotations to Bishop Watson's *An Apology for the Bible*, Blake responds to Watson's commentary that "I owe it strange, very strange, that [God] should have made an immediate manifestation of himself" with his own reflection on strangeness:

"but what is there that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here--...that there is a sun, and moon, and stars--...It is strange that God should speak to man formerly & not now. because it is not true but the Strangeness of the Sun Moon or Stars is Strange on a contrary account" (E 615).

⁶⁸ See, for example, Blake's description of double vision:

For double vision my eyes do see
And a double vision always with me
With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey
With my outward a Thistle across my way (Letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, E 722).

For Blake's remarks on "Spiritual sensation" see letter to Tusler, E 703

⁶⁹ *Four Zoas*, E 338. For Damasio's description of the body-brain blending where the nervous system touches the body, see *Feeling and Knowing*, 74-77, 91-94.

⁷⁰ *MHH* 14, E 39; *J* 39, E 187.

⁷¹ Sacks, *Hallucinations*, 34. emphasis original.

⁷² Eagleman, *Incognito*, 50.

⁷³ *Milton* 1, E 95. Also see *Milton* 14, E 108.

⁷⁴ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 25. For more on how magicians lean into the limitations of our vision (from the perspectives of an anthropologist, a biologist, and a neuroscientist), see David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Random House, 1996), 3-30. Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make our Worlds, Change our Minds & Shape our Futures* (New York: Random House, 2020), 14; Eagleman, *Incognito*, 26-27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 26.

⁷⁶ Frontispiece to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, E 45.

⁷⁷ For a character or caricature of this version of Blake, see J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (New York: Penguin, 1999).

⁷⁸ For example, see the Erdman transcription, *MHH* 23-24, E 43.

⁷⁹ Steven Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitations: Criticism and the Emotions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013), 228.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

⁸¹ See *Milton* 23, E 119; *Milton* 29, E 128; *Milton* 35, E 136; *J* 35, E 181; *J* 37, E 183.

⁸² Lily Gurton-Wachter. *Watchwords: Romanticism and the Poetics of Attention* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2016), 49.

⁸³ Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitations*, 228.

⁸⁴ *J* 39, E 187; *Europe* 12, E 64.

⁸⁵ *Milton* 9, E 103.

⁸⁶ A. D. Craig, *How Do You Feel? An Interoceptive Moment with Your Neurobiological Self* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 2014), 6.

⁸⁷ Rebecca Brewer, Jennifer Murphy, Geoffrey Bird, "Atypical Interoception as a Common Factor for Psychopathology: A Review," *Neuroscience & Biobehavior Reviews*, vol. 130 (November 2021), 470.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0149763421003456?via%3Dihub>

Currently, researchers typically measure interception sensitivity by asking their subjects to either detect or count their heartbeats internally, assessing their accuracy against an external monitor. Although this measurement specifically evaluates cardiac interoceptive activity, it is "used as a generalized index for interoceptive awareness." (Craig 6). Researchers commonly split that awareness into three distinct aspects: interoceptive sensitivity (accurate detection of bodily processes), interoceptive sensibility (the disposition to focus on bodily processes, assessed through surveys) and interoceptive insight or appraisal (meta-cognition of one's accuracy). This difficulty reflects both the perceptual challenge of surveying one's internal state ("although the body is always immediately present, it seems to be a most elusive perceptual object" and—especially for the science researchers—the challenge of rendering the insights from that self-surveillance into a form legible to the paradigm of "objective" knowledge that scientists and board certified medical personal rely on to communicate with each other. See Omer Van den Bergh, Nadia Zacharioudakis, Sibylle Petersen, "Interoception, Categorization, and Symptom Perception," *The Interoceptive Mind: From Homeostasis to Awareness* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2018), 212.

⁸⁸ In ways that recall some of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century discussions of the distinction between "sense and sensibility" (the title of a Jane Austen novel), interoceptive researchers have proposed distinctions between interoceptive *sensitivity* (measurable through the heartbeat test) and interoceptive *sensibility* (which depends upon the mind's ability to make sense of what it feels), as well as a metacognitive awareness of that difference between the two.

⁸⁹ Jessica Wapner, "The Paradox of Listening to Our Bodies, *The New Yorker*, July 6, 2023.

<https://www.newyorker.com/science/elements/the-paradox-of-listening-to-our-bodies>

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Rodolphe Gasché, "On Seeing Away: Attention and Abstraction in Kant," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol 8, no.3, 23.

⁹³ Frances Burney, Camilla (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 680. I encountered this quote in Goldsmith's *Blake's Agitations*, 22. His chapter "On Another's Sorrow" (pages 188-218) contains an excellent summary of the eighteenth century fascination with (and suspicion of) sympathy and sensibility.

⁹⁴ "A Vision of the Last Judgment, *E* 564.

⁹⁵ Damasio observes that the bodily effects of the mind's thoughts about the body is one of the overlooked miracles of interoception: "because the object and subject of our feeling precepts exist within the same organism, *they can interact*. The central nervous system can modify the body state that gives rise to a particular feeling and, by doing so, modify what is felt. *This is an extraordinary setup that has no counterpart in the world of external perception.*" (*Feeling and Knowing*, 89)

⁹⁶ Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 3, *E* 47.

⁹⁷ *Milton* 29, *E* 127; *Milton* 35, *E* 136.

⁹⁸ *MHH* 7, *E* 36.

⁹⁹ *E* 783.

"It is the Reasoning Power

An abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing

This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power

And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation" (*J* 8, *E* 153)

"Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand

It has a heart like thee; a brain open to heaven & hell

Withinside wondrous & expansive; its gates are not clos'd

I hope thine are not:" (*M* 20, *E* 114)

¹⁰⁰ *Milton* 28, *E* 127. also see *Milton* 29, *E* 127.

¹⁰¹ Saeedeh Sadeghi in an interview with Ellen Barry, cited in "Heartbeat May Shape our Perception of Time, Study Shows" *The New York Times*, March 14, 2023. Sadeghi is referring to this study: Saeedeh Sadeghi, Marc Wittmann, Eve De Rosa, Adam K. Anderson, "Wrinkles in Subsecond Time Perception are Synchronized to the Heart," *Psychophysiology*, vol. 60, issue 8 (August 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1111/psyp.14270>

¹⁰² Irena Arslanova, cited in Saga Briggs, "How does the brain keep time? It may rely on the body," *Big Think*. 15 February 2024. <https://bigthink.com/neuropsych/how-do-humans-process-time> : Arslanov observes, "When something coincides with the heart's contraction, its perceived duration gets contracted, in contrast to when it coincides with the heart's relaxation. So, we showed that the momentary state of the heart has a causal influence over how duration was experienced." Citation for the research summarized: Irena Arslanova, Vassilis Kotsaris, Manos Tsakiris, "Perceived time expands and contracts within each heartbeat," *Current Biology*, vol. 33, no.7 (April 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2023.02.034>

The study's authors conclude: "Overall, our findings are in line with recent research showing that interoceptive signals, particularly cardiac signals from the heart, shape neural activity and perception, and that the intricate interplay between the brain and the heart maintains our emotional experiences, which in turn modulate how time is experienced. Thus, the current results strengthen the view that time processing is an embodied process that arises from the continuous integration between exteroceptive and interoceptive processes." (1393)

¹⁰³ Adam K. Anderson, cited in James Dean interview with researchers, "'Wrinkles' in Time Experience linked with Heartbeat," *Cornell Chronicle*, March 6, 2023. <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2023/03/wrinkles-time-experience-linked-heartbeat>.

Research citation: Saeedeh Sadeghi, Marc Wittmann, Eve De Rosa, Adam K. Anderson, "Wrinkles in subsecond time perception are synchronized to the heart," *Psychophysiology* vol. 60, issue 8, (August 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1111/psyp.14270>

¹⁰⁴ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954). For an accessible and sympathetic description of Huxley's work, see Ido Hartogsohn, "When Aldous Huxley opened the Doors of Perception," *The MIT Press Reader*, December 20, 2021. <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/when-alldous-huxley-opened-the-doors-of-perception/>

¹⁰⁵ *Laocoön*, E 274. Valtteri Arstila, "Time Shows Down During Accidents," *Front Psychology* 3:196 (2012). [10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00196](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00196)

Also see Marc Wittman's work on how time perception changes during an unexpected emergency, such as a car crash: Marc Wittmann, Virginie van Wassenhove, "Why Time Slows Down during an Accident," *Frontiers for Young Minds*, (July 6, 2017) <https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2017.00032> and *Felt Time: The Psychology of How We Experience Time*, trans. Erik Bulter, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

E 274.

¹⁰⁶ "His real and immortal Self: was as appeard to those
Who dwell in immortality, as One sleeping on a couch
Of gold." (Milton 15, E 109)

" And every Moment has a Couch of gold for soft repose,
(A Moment equals a pulsation of the artery) (Milton 28, E 126)

¹⁰⁷ William Butler Yeats, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," *W. B. Yeats Selected Poems*, ed. Timothy Webb, (New York: Penguin, 2000).

For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper, flows on south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.

When Eagleman warns of the limits of introspection--of learning about the body from the inside--he attributes the limit to both our *access* to our internal body, but also the tendency of consciousness to take over the steering wheel when we don't know what we are doing. "One hundred million neurons" in your gut, he reminds us, "and no amount of your introspection can touch this. Nor, most likely, would you want it to. It's better off running as the automated, optimized machinery that it is, routing food along your gut and providing chemical signals to control the digestion faction without asking your opinion on the matter." (*Incognito*, 199).

¹⁰⁸ Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitation*, 242.

¹⁰⁹ *Laocoön*, E 274.

Niklaus Largier, *Figures of Possibility: Aesthetic Experience, Mysticism, and the Play of the Senses*. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2022), 16.

¹¹⁰ all citations from *Laocoön*, E 274.

¹¹¹ *Milton* 11, E 105.

¹¹² "Satan is fall'n from his station & never can be redeem'd
But must be new created continually moment by moment" (*Milton* 11, E 105)

¹¹³ *Milton* 28, E 127.

¹¹⁴ *J* 34, E 181; *J* 34-5, E 181.

¹¹⁵ *J* 37, E 183.

¹¹⁶ William Blake letter to Thomas Butts, 2 October 1900, Felpham, E 711-714, 712.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 712.

¹¹⁸ Blake, "The Mental Traveller," E 485. Neuroscientists remind us that *what* we see is determined *how* we see--the bodily state profoundly influences what appears to our eyes. Explaining how a soldier mistook a cowherder and his stick for guerrilla fighters with an AK-47, Barret insists that "his brain is working exactly as it should have," for "your view of the world is no photograph. It's a construction of your brain that is so fluid and so convincing that it appears to be accurate." The brain uses prediction based on past experience to construct its vision, "combining information from outside *and inside* your head to produce everything you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch" (Barrett, *7 1/2 Lessons*, 71). In the soldier's situation, "deep in the woods with [his] comrades, gripping a rifle, heart pounding, and there are moving figures ahead, maybe something pointy," he saw what his circumstance and past history primed him to see." (71)

¹¹⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 199.

¹²⁰ *J* 99, *E* 258.

¹²¹ "Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States [...] And Hell & the Grave! States that are not, but ah! Seem to be" (*M* 32, *E* 132).

¹²² *E* 79.

¹²³ from *The Book of Thel* 3, *E* 5,

"But Thel delights in these no more because I fade away,
And all shall say, without a use this shining woman liv'd,
Or did she only live. to be at death the food of worms."

¹²⁴ For a tender reading this this scene, see Goldstein's *Sweet Science*, 46.

¹²⁵ In the *Gates of Paradise* image, the tending hands are technically handless, performed by the worm whom (like the maternal "Clod of Clay" in the *Book of Thel*), "bends over the" infant, "cherishing [it] with a mother's smiles."

¹²⁶ *The Gates of Paradise* 16, *E* 33. Also see *For the Sexes* 16, *E* 267.

¹²⁷ Feldman, 7 1/2 *Lessons*, 1-2, 10-11.

¹²⁸ *J* 45, *E* 194.

¹²⁹ *J* 45, *E* 194; *J* 91 *E* 252.

¹³⁰ *MHH* 8, *E* 36.

¹³¹ Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitation*, 140-1.

¹³² *J* 91, *E* 252.

¹³³ *J* 81, *E* 251.

¹³⁴ *J* 63, *E* 214.

¹³⁵ "The Clod and the Pebble," *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *E* 19.

¹³⁶ *Milton* 28, *E* 126.

¹³⁷ "Living Form is External Existence" and "Grecian is Mathematical Form, Gothic is Living Form" (*On Virgil*, *E* 270). The contrast that Blake draws between the "mathematic" form (which reiterates his critiques of identifying a body its outline) helps to illuminate what he means by a *gothic* "living form." During the gothic craze of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the gothic (which often called itself the "romance") marked a notoriously porous and messy mode of embodiment--yet one that, for Blake, more accurately mirrors embodied reality than the sharply cleaved outlines our skull-and-skin-clad bodies present to our eyes.

¹³⁸ *J* 39, *E* 187.

¹³⁹ The passages are from the *Four Zoas*:

"Alas am I but as a flower then will I sit me down
Then will I weep then Ill complain & sigh for immortality
And chide my maker thee O Sun that raisedst me to fall" (*FZ* 127, *E* 396)

Sometimes I think thou art a flower expanding
Sometimes I think you art fruit breaking from its bud in dreadful dolor & pain (*FZ* 4, *E* 302)

¹⁴⁰ *FZ* 114, *E* 385.

¹⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," *Reflections: essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 333.

¹⁴² If you ask a toddler *where did you learn that*, they often have no idea. It's simply there, in their heads, on their lips, so naturalized that they proclaim it as their own invention--a delusion as we still endlessly reiterate with copyright laws.

¹⁴³ *The Book of Thel* 3, *E* 5.

¹⁴⁴ *FZ* 56, *E* 337.

¹⁴⁵ *E* 477.

¹⁴⁶ Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Gray Wolf Press, 2014) 155.

¹⁴⁷ *Europe* iii, *E* 60.

¹⁴⁸ *Visions of the Daughters of Oothoon* 8, *E* 50.

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 7:3, *King James Version*. In context, the beam is part of a moral lesson against passing judgment:

"Judge not, that ye not be judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considers not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of

thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (Matthew 7: 1-5)

¹⁵⁰ "Every Universal Form, was become barren mountains of Moral

Virtue: and every Minute Particular hardend into grains of sand:

And all the tendernesses of the soul cast forth as filth & mire" (*J* 45, *E* 191).

¹⁵¹ Also point out, maybe by way of Orc, that only ossifies the hard towards rebellion.

¹⁵² *MHH* 14, *E* 39.

¹⁵³ *MHH* 12, *E* 38.

¹⁵⁴ References to "The Divine Vision" shows up frequently throughout Blake's epics: *Milton*, *Jerusalem*, *The Four Zoas*. Here is an incomplete list:

"When Albion was slain upon his Mountains Tent

And in his Tent, thro envy of Living Form, even of the Divine Vision

And of the sports of Wisdom in the Human Imagination

Which is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus, blessed for ever." (*Milton* 3, *E* 96)

"Thus Satan rag'd amidst the Assembly! and his bosom grew

Opake against the Divine Vision" (*Milton* 9, *E* 103)

"Tho driven away with the Seven Starry Ones into the Ulro

Yet the Divine Vision remains Every-where For-ever. Amen." (*Milton* 22, *E* 116)

"Retaining only Satans Mathematic Holiness, Length: Bredth & Highth

Calling the Human Imagination: which is the Divine Vision & Fruition

In which Man liveth eternally: madness & blasphemy, against

Its own Qualities" (*Milton* 32, *E* 132)

"The Divine Vision still was seen

Still was the Human Form, Divine

Weeping in weak & mortal clay

O Jesus still the Form was thine." (*J* 27, *E* 173)

"return Albion! return!

Thy brethren call thee, and thy fathers, and thy sons,

Thy nurses and thy mothers, thy sisters and thy daughters

Weep at thy souls disease, and the Divine Vision is darkend:" (*J* 4, *E* 146)

"Fearing that Albion should turn his back against the Divine Vision

Los took his globe of fire to search the interiors of Albions

Bosom, in all the terrors of friendship, entering the caves

Of despair & death" (*J* 45, *E* 194)

"Wondring she saw the Lamb of God within Jerusalems Veil

The divine Vision seen within the inmost deep recess

Of fair Jerusalems bosom in a gently beaming fire" (*FZ* 104, *E* 376)

"His inward eyes closing from the Divine vision & all

His children wandering outside from his bosom fleeing away" (*FZ* 21, *E* 313)

¹⁵⁵ *Nowhere* is the latin etymology of in Thomas Moore's 1516 work, *Utopia*.

¹⁵⁶ *J* 91, *E* 251,

¹⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:9-12. King James Version.

¹⁵⁸ "Jesus considerd Imagination to be the Real Man & says I will not leave you Orphanned and I will manifest myself to you he says also the Spiritual Body or Angel as little Children always behold the Face of the Heavenly Father." (Annotations to Berkeley's *Siris*, *E* 663)

¹⁵⁹ For example, the Pauline metaphor of a glass seen darkly shows up at the end of philosopher Noga Arikha's description of the "interoceptive revolution:" <https://aeon.co/essays/the-interoceptive-turn-is-maturing-as-a-rich-science-of-selfhood>: "No window pane into the self is perfectly transparent. But we are clearing up some smudges."

Noga Arikha. "The Interoceptive Turn," *Aeon* 18 June 2019. <https://aeon.co/essays/the-interoceptive-turn-is-maturing-as-a-rich-science-of-selfhood>

¹⁶⁰ *J* 34, *E* 180.

¹⁶¹ *J* 32, *E* 178.

¹⁶² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 5:856-861.

"[...] who saw

When this creation was? rememberst thou

Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?

We know no time when we were not as now;

Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised [860]

By our own quick'ning power [...]"

¹⁶³ Some variation of that phrase occurs at least eight times throughout *Milton*, *E* 96, 98, 100, 101, 102, 105.

¹⁶⁴ *Milton* 1, *E* 95:

"And did the Countenance Divine,

Shine forth upon our clouded hills?

And was Jerusalem builded here,

Among these dark Satanic Mills?"

For more on Blake's "Satanic Mills," see Devin Zuber, "Satanic Mills and Jerusalem Redeemed: William Blake's Urban Ecopoetics," *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, vol. 10, issue 1 (2009), 39-49.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2009.10589043>

¹⁶⁵ *J* 34, *E* 180.

¹⁶⁶ Eagleman, *Incognito*, 8.

¹⁶⁷ *J* 39, *E* 187.

¹⁶⁸ *J* 57, *E* 207.

¹⁶⁹ See *Milton* 5, *E* 99 and *J* 49, *E* 198.

¹⁷⁰ *E* 721; *Milton* 10, *E* 104.

¹⁷¹ Wapner, "The Paradox of Listening to Our Bodies." What Eagleman colloquially calls "consciousness" are largely processes of thinking, deliberation, decision-making: for example: "once [consciousness] meddles in details it doesn't understand, the operation runs less effectively. Once you begin deliberating about where your fingers are jumping on the keyboard, you can no longer pull off the piece." (*Incognito*, 8) "When you are losing [at tennis], simply ask your opponent how she serves the ball so well. Once she contemplates the mechanics of her serve and tries to explain it, she's sunk" (*Incognito*, 74).

¹⁷² Physician Lewis Thomas makes a similar point in essay written for *The New England Journal of Medicine*:

If I were informed tomorrow that I was in direct communication with my liver, and could now take over, I would become deeply depressed. I'd sooner be told, forty thousand feet over Denver, that the 747 jet in which I had a coach seat was now mine to operate as I pleased; at least I would have the hope of bailing out, if I could find a parachute and discover quickly how to open a door. Nothing would save me and my liver, if I were in charge. For I am, to face the facts squarely, considerably less intelligent than my liver. I am, moreover, constitutionally unable to make hepatic decisions, and I prefer not to be obligated to, ever. I would not be able to think of the first thing to do. Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 78.