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Critical Feelings and Pleasurable Associations

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> Wher'er the aged Beggar takes his rounds,
> The mild necessity of use compels
> To acts of love; and habit does the work
> Of reason, yet prepares that after joy
> Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
> By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursu'd
> Doth find itself insensibly dispos'd
> To virtue and true goodness …
>
> (Wordsworth, *The Old Cumberland Beggar*)

In this essay, I read Wordsworth's program for a popular poetry as an instructive example for those seeking to harness a philosophy of the virtual to a democratic politics. I highlight affinities in his writings between a creative imagination and a democratic sociability, both of which rest on a capacity to find pleasure in novelty and difference. Wordsworth describes a poetic imagination that delights in the multiplication of sensuously perceived similarities and differences. This same delight, he suggests, can both promote and benefit from the extension of sympathetic bonds beyond the domestic sphere to interclass relationships, and even to a multitude of strangers. He therefore theorized and experimented with new poetic techniques with the aim of distributing these pleasures to a broad audience, combining critical feelings with pleasurable associations. His poetry thus serves to disseminate among its readers what Brian Massumi – echoing Spinoza – has called an "implied Deleuzean ethics," namely the "multiplication of powers of existence, to ever-divergent regimes of action and expression" (Massumi 2002, 34). Moreover, it highlights the potential value of such an ethos for modern democratic societies, which require capacities and opportunities to form gratifying associations with diverse populations under conditions of rapid social change.

Critical Feelings

With their *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) Wordsworth and Coleridge famously promise to inaugurate a democratic poetics, meaning one that both draws its inspiration from and expresses itself in the common language and psychic registers of the middle and lower classes. However, they aim not merely to replicate, but also to educate popular affections. As Wordsworth explains in his *Preface* to the 1800 edition, their poetry is addressed to an audience whose discerning powers have been degraded by specialized labor, the overstimulation of urban life, and compensatory "gross stimulants" provided by the popular literature of the day.

> For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most

> effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves … when I think upon this degrading thirst for outrageous stimulation […]" (LB, 9-10).

In response, the authors undertake to heighten sensitivity to excitements less gross, to enhance powers of discernment and generosity toward the new by teaching its readers to receive pleasure from novelty and difference. Wordsworth allows that we prefer to be pleased "in the particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased" (LB, 24). However, he argues, "the powers of language are not so limited as [the reader] may suppose …" (24). Moreover, the aesthetic education that enables people to receive "other enjoyments" than those to which they are is accustomed is "likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations" (LB, 25). This education does not instill a rational control of emotional drives, nor does it amplify moral conformity; instead, it pluralizes attachments while drawing attention to the dynamic intersection of thought and feeling in a pleasurable state of creative association. As Wordsworth suggests, sympathetic powers of imagination are especially crucial for social solidarity in modern, that is, diverse and mobile societies. I defer for the time being a discussion of the later Wordsworth's reservations concerning modern, urban life and political reform in favor of a closer look at the nuances of his poetic technique and the complex feelings it aims to inspire.

As Wordsworth makes clear, the purpose of *Lyrical Ballads* is not simply to elevate common sentiments, but also to subject them to reflection, that is, "…namely, to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement. But, speaking in language somewhat more appropriate, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature" (LB, 8). Wordsworth poetry thus draws his reader's attention to the dynamic interplay of thinking and feeling, illustrating different ways in which ideas are associated in distinct affective milieus. However, by implication, this attention must itself by stimulated affectively (it must have its own affective milieu). As he explains, poetry performs a complex act of translation, whereby the poet communicates affections modified by a long process of reflection. All good poetry, he declares, is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subject but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply" (LB, 8). Thinking, for Wordsworth, entails a continuous exchange of sensations present and remembered.

> For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall

> describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified (LB, 8).

For Wordsworth, poetry communicates feelings modified by philosophical reflection through poetic descriptions of everyday objects and impressions. It turns thought into sensations. Yet as the passage above attests, thoughts are already "representatives" of past feelings that modify those imparted by immediate impressions. Contemplation adds yet another layer to a dynamic interplay of affections, one that generates patterns of association. These patterns, in turn, become habits of association that the poet can replicate through poetic language. However, in properly circular fashion, this ability itself rests on the possession of "much sensibility," which for Wordsworth means that the poet "rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them …" (LB, 13). In the prose of contemporary neuroscience, we could say the poet is sensitive to affinities between introcepts and percepts, the movements of his body and impressions of others. Moreover, he has a good "working memory," able to call up volitions and passions in the absence of proximate stimuli. We will further explore the pre- or extra- philosophical source of these capacities below.

By introducing a reflexive meta-affect into popular sentiments without the medium of long reflection Wordsworth would provide nothing less than a remedy for the crushing effects of mass culture and industrial labor on sympathy and creative agency. To this end, he combines a description of poetic dispositions with a set of poetic techniques to facilitate their sensuous education.

How precisely does the poet communicate his poetic sensibilities? Broadly speaking, Wordsworth's technique is to blend novelty and surprise with pleasure by disordering the spatial, temporal and categorical logic of familiar impressions and combining them in rhythmic arrangements. "The end of poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure. Now, by the supposition, excitement is an unusual and irregular state of the mind; ideas and feelings do not, in that state, succeed each other in accustomed order" (LB, 19). Excitement breaks perception and cognition free from routine patterns of association. Yet disorder and novelty are not always so rewarding. Excitement must not be "carried beyond its proper bounds," where the proportion of pain is too high. Hence, regularity of some kind is added in order that it must be tempered "by an intertexture of ordinary feeling" (LB, 19). The poet elicits pleasure by familiar devices, drawing on common responses to objects and conventional habits of association with poetic forms, and transfers that pleasure to unconventionally ordered relations among impressions and figures.

Meter is the medium of this transfer, tempering the disruption of familiar causal and narrative orders with the pleasure of regular rhythms of arrangement. Somewhat ironically, meter makes a poetry of the everyday *more* accessible, which for Wordsworth is what justifies its use in a volume premised on the lack of distinction between poetic and prosaic subjects. Meter performs a complex double task. On one hand, it modulates "pathetic" objects and situations, keeping their impact within the bounds of pleasure. On the other hand, it lends a pleasure – "whether

cheerful or melancholy" – habitually associated with metrical rhythms of various kinds to words that otherwise fail to provoke adequate interest. Meter simultaneously tempers overstimulation and supplements dispassion, "an effect which ... is to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement" (Ibid, 20). One could say Meter blunts and routinizes shock. It gives the unexpected an aura of pleasant familiarity. When gently introduced, surprise does not simply interrupt the paths of familiar associations, but opens them up to new connections (LB, 20). Meter adds the pleasure of creative association, that is, "the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude and dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder" (Ibid, 20). Wordsworth's poetics thus combines estrangement with pleasure, interruption with arrangement. It makes chaos fun by joining it with composition.

To reiterate, the pleasure Wordsworth describes does not merely supplement powers of discernment. Rather, pleasure is the motor of proliferating similitudes and discriminations, as Wordsworth makes clear in his other descriptions of the compositional disposition of the poet, the communication of which is the aim of the poems.

> I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment (Ibid, 21).

In this passage, Wordsworth describes a complex interplay of composing and composed affections. Far from being merely expressed, feelings are recollected, intensified and qualified by "various pleasures." Tranquility not only subtracts force from recollected sense experience, but also adds diverse affections. Anticipating our argument below, we might say it opens what Wordsworth will call in his *Prelude* a "spot of time," an interval of pleasurable associations among various affects that gives way – by a "species of reaction" – to the recombination or "description" of abundant pleasure. The challenge for the poet is to transmit a similarly dynamic combination of familiar, obscure and novel ideas and sensations. Wordsworth continues,

> Now, if Nature be thus cautious in preserving in a state of enjoyment a being thus employed, the Poet ought to profit by the lesson thus set forth to him, and ought especially to take care that whatever passions he communicates to his reader, those passions, if his Reader's mind be sound and vigorous, should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure. Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or Meter of the same or similar construction, an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of

> Meter, differing from it so widely, all of these imperceptibly make up *a complex feeling of delight*, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling which will always be found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. … I wish to draw attention to the truth that the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous" (Ibid, my emphasis).

Wordsworth thus exhibits the powers of the imagination in a complex affective state, a mood in which agitation combines with reflection, disorder with composition. In this state, surprise is gentle and difference pleasurable. If for Wordsworth the mind is sentimental, it is also the case that the heart is auricular; it has an ear. His poetry teaches the reader of the mutual interplay of perception, motivation and feeling, our constitutive and compositional relationship with the beings and forces of nature. By modifying that composition in a pleasurable way, it shows us ourselves as both poet and poem, both participant and observer of imaginative self-transformation. In short, feelings become critical.

Wordsworth knew that poetic self-transformation was not everyone's cup of tea. He recognizes, recall, that we prefer to be pleased in our customary ways. Yet he also believed we might be persuaded to think and feel otherwise, albeit with some effort. "They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers … will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness" (LB, 6). Wordsworth was not above using shame as a goad. However, he argues that our tastes can also be complicated and extended along the ductile paths of pleasurable association. In closing, he proposes this practice to his reader, recommending that he or she who enjoys a poem extend their appreciation to others by the same author that do not at first seem worthy, giving them another chance (LB, 23-24). This practice, he suggests, may "improve our own taste" and "temper the rashness of decision" (Ibid, 24). He thus invites readers to take part in a poetic transformation of their own sensibilities, to cultivate a sympathetic disposition to the new and unfamiliar.

Suspenseful Communications

Emotional states of the sort Wordsworth describes, which reveal the mind's creative powers of imagination to itself, preoccupied a variety of thinkers throughout the Eighteenth Century and have become a staple of Romantic clichés. Writing in the same historical moment, for example, Friedrich Schiller describes moments in which the imagination is liberated from both immediate perceptions (what he calls the "negative condition" of the imagination) and the "sentinel" of the understanding, resulting a state in which ideas "rush in pele-mele" (Schiller 1967, 209; 292). Only, what takes place in these chaotic moments of freedom, and what if anything follows from them? How can they inform ethical or political practice, or even, as Wordsworth puts it, transform our "physical nature?"

While many authors sought in these states some insight into the nature and process of human faculties, what they found varied widely. Thus, while Wordsworth's descriptions of the mind's sudden encounter with its own powers of imagination share some features with Kant's account of the sublime, he differently conceives mind's relationship with nature. According to Kant, we encounter the sublime when impressions overwhelm the mind's powers of conceptual

understanding, due either to their forcefulness or their sheer number (the "dynamical" and "mathematical" sublime, respectively) (Kant 1987, 101). In this state, representations of sensuous experience momentarily give way, and we encounter the powers of the mind that supersede those of the senses, as when we are led to contemplate non-phenomenal ideas, namely infinity (Ibid, 112). An object of nature therefore cannot be sublime, but it can be "… suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind" (Ibid, 99). Kant's description of this experience and its preconditions bear many resemblances with Wordsworth's description of poetic sensibilities. For Kant also, the sublime arises from a dynamic combination of percepts and associations. The mind must be properly prepared, filled with "all sorts of ideas" if is not simply going to stare in fascination at say, a stormy ocean, but instead be "induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness" (Ibid). Interestingly, Kant also correlates such states with pleasure, albeit what he calls a "negative pleasure." Noting these similarities, Neil Hertz explains that the "emotional satisfaction" that comes as the imagination fails to surpass its limits and "sinks back into itself" is correlated with an intuitive sense of the intellect's autonomy, which for Kant indicates "man's supersensible destiny" (See Hertz, 1985, 50. Cf. Kant, 121). Kant thus establishes the prototype for similar "moments of blockage" Hertz identifies in various Eighteenth century depictions of the sublime, whereby frustrated powers of representation are converted into an absolute boundary behind which the mind finds unity in its solipsism. Rather than gain its bearings in the world, the self takes flight into the transcendent (Hertz 1985, 53).

Many passages in Wordsworth's poetry invite comparison with Kant's description of the sublime. Readings that place them together typically center on those passages in *The Prelude* where minute and subtle descriptions of perceptions (usually of natural elements and forces) give way to exalted dreamlike introspections, such as in the famous crossing of the Alps (See P1805VI). However, Wordsworth's description of poetic inspiration in *Lyrical Ballads* indicates that in these moments of creative ferment the mind is simultaneously composing and contemplating, that it dwells not in the supersensible but instead in a proliferation of affinities traced among remembered and present thought-affects, those similar passions and volitions in the self and the universe to which the poet is especially attuned. Rather than staging an encounter with the supersensible in an apocalyptic suspension of sense experience, then, Wordsworth's poetry traffics in something akin to what Gilles Deleuze and others following Henri Bergson call the virtual, that is, an immanent multiplicity of incipient sensorimotor patterns, or what William Connolly has dubbed the *infra*sensible (Connolly 1999, 13). I find this view corroborated by numerous passages in *The Prelude*, which exhibit the same dynamic combination of past and present impressions, passions and volition Wordsworth ascribes to the poetic imagination in *Lyrical Ballads*. Before turning to some of these passages, I gather support from some readings that inspire and clarify my own.

To read Wordsworth as a poet of immanence is nothing new. In a conversation with Mark Halliday, for example, Allen Grossman describes Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* as founded on the "perpetually renewed hope" that "in a poetry of immanence we would be able to find value in the present reality that we see and we share" (Grossman and Halliday, 35). It should come as little surprise that Grossman finds value in the present not because it reflects a higher purpose but because it harbors an "immanent counter-reality" (Ibid, 34). To find value in the present is not to sanctify convention, nor even to discover that another world is possible, but

rather to discover that things already are (also) otherwise, that the channel of the present through which the past slips into the future contains multitudes. Only, if other worlds are here in this one, where do they reside, and how are they tapped?

Paul de Man also reads Wordsworth as a thinker of immanence, "the earthly soul, of consciousness, and of historical time – and not […] of nature, of eternity, or of transcendental vision" (de Man 1993, 146). If de Man distinguishes historical time from a common "nature" in this passage, this is only the case insofar nature is conceived in something other than earthly terms, that is, apart from the flux of time. For de Man, the earthly soul is possessed of a link to the beyond by way of memory (83). The bond between us, he argues, "is not one of common enterprise, or of a common belonging to nature: it is much rather the recognition of a common temporal predicament" (de Man, 91). Our common temporality is not that of shared origins or destinations but rather of passage, the becoming and the passing away of every natural and historical order, all of which are bracketed by death (which does not count as a destination, since we cannot arrive there). His reading of Wordsworth's poetry reveals figures of nature that correspond not only to communion but also to indifferentiation and loss. Indeed, it suggests belonging is hardly more natural or mutual than estrangement in "a world that does not escape from mutability but asserts itself within the knowledge of its own transience" (de Man 1993, 87).

As de Man argues, our recognition of our temporal predicament takes a palpable, temporal form of its own. In Wordsworth's *Prelude*, he finds the complicated effects Wordsworth ascribed to meter in his Preface *to Lyrical Ballads* both performed and described. He writes, "The "surprises" that Wordsworth's language gives us are indeed such "gentle shocks of mild surprise" that the transition from stability to suspense can accomplish almost without our being aware of it" (de Man 1993, 78). In his reading of the passage where Wordsworth refers to gentle shocks, "The Winander Boy," de Man adds to the layering of rhetorical and descriptive registers, highlighting Wordsworth's peculiar (surprising) use of the word "hung" to describe both viewer and scene. "It is as if the solidity of the earth were suddenly pulled away from under our feet and we were left "hanging" from the sky instead of standing on the ground" (Ibid, 79; Cf. 142-3). If reader and subject are suspended, they are not motionlessness but rhythmically swaying, if you will, between different positions in which surprise and suspense are variously evoked and figured, simulated and contemplated. The same interlude of the poem stages another complex series of doublings, a multivalent confusion of voices. The boy in the poem projects his voice across a lake, mimicking the hoots of owls in the distance.

> And they would shout
> Across the wat'ry vale, and shout again
> Responsive to his call, with quivering peals
> And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud,
> Redoubled and redoubled – concourse wild
> Of mirth and jocund din. And when it chanced
> That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
> Then sometimes in that silence, while he hung
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene

> Would enter unawares into his mind
> With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
> Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received'
> Into the bosom of the steady lake (P1805 V, 399-413).

This passage follows an oscillation between communion and estrangement. The boy projects and receives, imitating the vibrations of nature until they become indistinguishable, a joyous exchange of voices. From the din of their conflation, he is then released by an interruption of communication into a state of calm uncertainty. In this tranquil interval, however, conversation is not suspended altogether. Instead, his suspenseful uncertainty finds its own collaborators among the forces traversing heaven and earth. He dimly senses those more distant forces that surround pleasurable rhythms. Among them are remembered echoes of similar states, past anticipations, those familiar feelings of strangeness.

As de Man makes clear, this encounter with transience does not reduce to a simple recognition of mortality. In moments of suspense, we do not meet death, something beyond the life of the senses, but instead forces beyond our ordinary powers of comprehension and imitation. The temporality of suspense is not that of the will-have-been, but the has-been will, so to speak, not the indefinite deferral of an impossible certainty so much as the palpable return of an earlier chaos where sensations are not yet neatly divided by time or position, but instead mingle past and present, subject and object. If we share a common temporal predicament, it is not only that of finitude but also of prolepsis, not only an anticipation of death but also a sense of becoming, the desire and hope of "something ever more about to be" (P1805VI, 606-8). Proust similarly describes a joyful liberation from time and death in moments of powerful recollection. Plumbing the well of memory he senses upon tasting the iconic Madeleine, Proust turns from immediate impressions to examine his mind. Seeking an image attracted by a taste, the mind confuses a movement toward the past with an emergence into the present. It combines seeking with creation and comes "face to face with what does not yet exist, which it alone can make actual, which it alone can bring into the light of day" (Proust 2003, 61).

Kerry McSweeney provides further insight into the intricacies of Wordsworth's imaginative intervals. Like de Man, he finds in these intervals a "perceptual and affective overlay of past and present" (McSweeney, 44). This temporal overly, he suggests, is enabled by a spatial dislocation. "The metaphorical phrase 'spots of time' does not refer to the fixing of temporal events in space but rather to the emancipation of temporal experiences from the spatial order" (59). The dislocation of time from space, in turn, is facilitated by what he calls the "dynamics of perception" (62). Alerted to the significance of different perceptual registers by his interest in developmental psychology,[1] he notices that the relaxation of voluntary attention and the opening of "spots of time" in *The Prelude* correspond with synaesthetic shifts between visual and aural registers and a blend of proximate and distant percepts. Thus, the imagination is emancipated from the spatial order by a displacement of sight, the paradigmatic sense of Enlightenment – voluntary, presentist and objectifying – in favor of other senses that confuse the inner life of the subject with the world it apprehends. A scent, we know, can transport us to another time and place. However, McSweeney tells us Wordsworth had a poor sense of smell (50). In *The Prelude*, it is more commonly a concentrated *listening* that powerfully evokes experience.

Linking these dynamics in the 'Winander Boy' to Burke's description of the sublime, McSweeney writes,

> 'Though it may appear strange,' Edmund Burke notes in his treatise on the sublime, 'that such a [perceptual] change as produces a relaxation, should immediately produce a sudden convulsion; it is yet most certainly so.' The boy's attention had been energetically braced up to an act of intense visual observation. But the predominately aural particulars of his immediate surroundings… had suddenly penetrated his 'capacity of apprehension' in a roughly unsettling way that left a lasting resonance in memory (McSweeney, 60-61).

Here, McSweeney suggests that sublimity arises when focused attention gives way to a kind of distracted receptivity, as if the subject were opened to registrations from one sense when the deliberate attention of the will is preoccupied with another and so unable to deflect extraneous influences.

McSweeney's reading finds purchase in the same passage de Man's highlights, where the "jocund din" of chaotic voices gives way to a tranquil silence out of which arise perturbations otherwise unperceived. In such moments, McSweeney suggests, distant forces that arrive from beyond the conventional horizon of our spatial awareness resonate with inner removes, "far" inside us (58; See P1805V, p.172 fn.8). Such are the states Wordsworth seeks to replicate in his poetics, tranquil suspensions of voluntary activity combine with gentle, resonant agitations. In such moments, we perceive the murmur of forces as yet unimagined, composing impressions and volitions other than those with which we are familiar, much as Wordsworth heard the sound of distant mountain waters[2] (McSweeney, 46). As Wordsworth puts it in the passage from *Lyrical Ballads* cited above, the poet communicates "an indistinct perception perpetually renewed" (LB, *Op cit*). From the music of his language, as from the resonances of starlight and waters, "some inward agitations thence are brought,/What'er their office, whether to beguile/Thoughts over busy in the course they took,/Or animate an hour of vacant ease" (P1850XII, 332-335).

Hertz finds similar dynamics in Wordsworth's staging of the aforementioned "moments of blockage." Wordsworth's poems, he suggests, stage a more radical dislocation and a more fragile recovery of sense than Kant's philosophy. Like de Man, he finds in *The Prelude* a "radical flux and dispersion of the subject" both described and performed (Hertz, 58). However, Hertz highlights those dispersions that appear in social encounters in book VII, where Wordsworth vacillates not between different senses, but rather between phenomenological and discursive orientations, namely those of the autobiographer and "poet-impresario." These figures correspond with different modes of reception, namely seeing the visible and reading the legible (Ibid, 58-9). According to Hertz, Wordsworth subdues the confusion between these various modes of registration not by transcending them, but rather by establishing within his text a "minimal" differentiation between sensations and their descriptions (Ibid, 69-60). This minimal difference is stabilized when vacillation is momentarily arrested by emblems for that difference itself – people affixed with signs – that allow the subject to dwell in the transition. We will return to the emblems in question and their contextual significance below.

Despite their different emphases and concerns, these readings share a common insight, namely that the sublime moments staged in Wordsworth's poems are characterized not by sheer decomposition but instead by allegorical communications between different senses and perspectives. Moving between them, disorder and novelty acquire a rhythm of their own. The virtues of this reading of the sublime become clearer when contrasted with those less nuanced. In *Telling Rhythm*, for example, Amittai Aviram describes the rhythmic effect of poetry on the body as sublime, inasmuch as it appeals to a sensuous experience that precedes the interpretive actions of imagination and intellect. "It is the play of tension between that appeal to the body and the intellect's efforts to put it into images and ideas that will work for us as a fairly inclusive and yet subtle definition of poetry" (21). Drawing larger implications by analogy, he writes, "Poetic meaning is to the rhythm of poetic form as social constructions of the body are to the body itself" (Ibid. 21-2). Hence poetic practice becomes for him a matter of an encounter with the "impossibility" of fully putting rhythm into words, a revelation of "the limits of the social construction of reality through language" (Ibid. 6). What Aviram characterizes as a "tension" between bodily and intellect thus presumes too stark a separation. For Wordsworth by contrast, bodily dispositions do not so much exceed as condition the play of representations in the imagination. Not only are affects described, but descriptions are also affectively stimulated. Our diction, rhythm and manner of speaking change with our moods. We can similarly qualify Aviram's corollary argument. The body is never "itself" apart from the social environment by which it is modified, though its potentials always exceed a given situation and signage. Wordsworth does not seek simply to stage an encounter with the limits of familiar meanings but rather to modify the rhythm of symbolic and social interactions themselves, enhancing the pleasure and the agility of our "constructions," changing thereby our physical nature.

Aviram displays the reductive tendencies of his approach in his analysis of the Tone Loc hit, 'Funky Cold Medina.' In this song, Aviram finds an allegory for what he calls "the uncontrollable power of the rhythm of rap music" (167). Like "the "utter chaos of sexual desire" that results from ingesting the aphrodisiacal 'Funky Cold Medina,' he explains, "the energy that rap unleashes can go in any direction …" One wonders what Aviram would make of the 1959 hit 'Love Potion # 9' by the Clovers, which also describes transgressive desires unleashed by an aphrodisiac. This song also has a rhythm, but is it likewise "uncontrollable?" Rhythms vary, after all. Moreover, they appeal differently to bodies with differently conditioned tastes and judgments. The rhythms of rock and roll in the 1950s were heard by critics at the time in much the same way as Aviram hears rap. It is only to untrained ears that it all sounds like chaos.

The songs' lyrics also suggest more variable relationships between promiscuous desire and social convention. The narrator in the Clover's song takes the 'Love Potion' himself. Pleasurably addled, he can't tell day from night, and kisses "everything in sight." The spree ends when he kisses a cop, who breaks his bottle of potion.[3] Ton Loc uses his Medina more like a poorly chosen date rape drug. His narrator doses, then rebuffs a transvestite and a marriage-minded woman. Although both songs describe the loss of control, they set up a conflict not between bodily sensation and social practice, but rather between different modes and objects of desire. They suggest strong desires are dangerous (and punishable) not because they cannot be represented *per se*, but because they can foster diverse affections. Furthermore, the songs differently describe the desires in question, and implicitly take different sides in the conflict with convention. I n 'Love Potion #9,' unbridled promiscuity comes off as relatively harmless and

censure is official, yet still somewhat ambiguous (we aren't told what happens when the officer breaks open the bottle …). Not coincidentally, censure and control are most conspicuously reinforced in the song where Aviram finds uncontrollable desire. The Medina, Tone Loc concludes, is a "monster."[4] By describing rap in similarly inflated terms, Aviram unwittingly lends credence to this view. However, estrangement can be pleasurable rather than monstrous, and passion can amplify moral disavowal as well as social transgression. Moreover, rhythm and its description are mutually transformative. Tunes and words each modify the passions we associate with the other.

What Aviram describes as rhythm comes closer to what Wordsworth described as "excitement," namely strong passions that disrupt the conventional order of thoughts and impressions. For Wordsworth, rhythm was distinguished from excitement precisely inasmuch as the former makes possible harmonious compositions in a state of pleasurable stimulation. These compositions, in turn, produce not only different interpretations, but also changes in physical nature (such as desire and its objects). Wordsworth aimed not only excite or disorient his readers, but to sensitize them to the play of its own ideas, affections and their influences. As he makes clear, this requires that novel encounters be combined with pleasurable associations. If strong feelings are to yield new collaborations rather than provoke reactive hostilities, they must be inflected with harmonizing resonances.

Fellow Travelers in Wordsworth's Spots of Time

Those familiar with Bergson and Deleuze will have anticipated some of the affinities I find between their description of the virtual and Wordsworth's poetic imagination. Like Wordsworth, Bergson and Deleuze describe thought as imbued with affect, and correlate different modes of ideation with different emotional states. Moreover, they are preoccupied with instances of spatial and temporal dislocation that provide momentary insight into the creative, compositional character of intelligence and agency. For both, the latter involve a blending of past and present affects in emergent perceptions and volitions.

I am hardly the first to identify affinities between Romanticism and contemporary philosophies of immanence. For some, this amounts to an indictment of the latter. Yet as Marjorie Levinson has suggested, much can be gained by placing Wordsworth and other Romantic authors in the company of post-structural philosophy and post-classical science (Levinson, 2007). She does so by linking them to a common ancestor, namely Spinoza.[5] Referencing Wordsworth's *Preface*, she writes,

> In other words (Wordsworth's and Shelley's words), the greater the body's susceptibility to "the goings-on of the universe," the greater its capacity to remember former impressions and to use them "to imagine things that increase the body's power of acting" (that is the more "habitually impelled [that body is] to create volitions and passions ... where [it] does not find them"), the greater a man's capacity to "imagine intensely and comprehensively ... put[ting] himself in the place of another and of many others [until] the pains and pleasures of his species ... become his own," the greater that individual's rational power (Levinson, 28; CF. Spinoza 1996, IVP38).

For Wordsworth, as for Spinoza, Levinson notes, the imagination expands with heightened powers of registration and recollection. Furthermore, agency and intelligence increase together since, as Wordsworth suggests, both self and world are composed of passions and volitions. Likewise, for Henri Bergson, "perception measures the possible actions of a body on things and vice versa" (Pearson, 1117; Cf. Bergson 1991, 32). Living beings, especially humans, are endowed with sensory and mnemonic faculties that indetermine and so multiply these possible actions, making for "a variable relation between the living being and the more-or-less distant influence of the objects which interest it" (Bergson 1991, 33). Bergson writes,

> … In the measure that the reaction becomes more uncertain, and allows more room for *suspense*, does the distance increase at which the animal is sensible of the action of that which interests it. By sight, by hearing, it enters into relation with an ever greater number of things, and is subject to more and more distant influences. […] The degree of independence of which a living being is master, or, as we shall say, the zone of indetermination which surrounds its activity, allows, then, of an a priori estimate of the number and the distance of the things with which it is in relation (Bergson 1991, 32, my emphasis).

Bergson locates the "center" of indetermination in what he describes as a sort of telephonic exchange composed by the brain and nervous system. Brian Massumi – whose rich study of the virtual integrates Bergson's and Deleuze's philosophy with contemporary neuroscience – updates the picture to account for wireless communications, so to speak, between parallel processes. In his words, "the measure of a living thing's potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into another" (see Massumi 2002, 35-6). Synaesthetic exchanges between different registers massively increase the combinatorial powers of the virtual. From a host of different potential actions reverberating along the branching and intersecting pathways linking multimodal perceptions with motor systems, a given response is selected. "Yet, as a great multitude of motor tracks can open simultaneously in this substance to one and the same excitation from the periphery, this disturbance may subdivide to any extent, and consequently dissipate itself in innumerable motor reactions which are merely nascent" (Ibid, 30). Once more, a state of suspense is not one of simple indifference, but of indecision among multiple incipient or virtual actions that hum alongside every path we take, resonating with the one we're on. For the most part, we glide over suspense as on smooth rails, the mind covering its traces with what neuroscientists call "backward time-referral." Occasionally though, indeterminacy is prolonged and we dwell for a time in a state of agitated calm. "Hence the office of the brain is sometimes to conduct the movement received to a chosen organ or reaction, and sometimes to open this movement the totality of the motor tracts, so that it may manifest there all the potential reactions with which it is charged, and may divide and so disperse" (Bergson 1991, 30).

As Bergson argues, the combinatorial potentials of interacting bodies are not only sensed but also remembered. In most circumstances, Bergson explains, memory is selectively evoked and combined with perception in accord with the purposes of action, "thinned and sharpened" until it cuts like a blade through the dense tangle of impressions and associations (Bergson 1998, 106). Recollected aspects of thousands of events blend with partial and inferential percepts[6] (See

Bergson 1991, 33). As we bore our way into the future, the new is plowed under, seamlessly folded into the familiar by the rapid, sweeping gestures of the similar. However, an immense record is retained of the impressions that, as Wordsworth puts it, enter "unawares," those "…collateral objects and appearances,/ albeit lifeless and doomed to sleep/ Until maturer seasons called them forth/ To impregnate and elevate the mind" (P1799II, 419-426). What Bergson calls "pure" or Proust called "involuntary" memory, is incorporated and subsists alongside voluntary memory, usually below the threshold of consciousness and apart from its narrative temporality. Under the right conditions, when the narrative flow of expectations and plans is momentarily suspended, aspects of the past can emerge with vivid immediacy and in non-narrative order. "Essentially fugitive, [personal recollections] become materialized only by chance, either when an accidentally precise determination of our bodily attitude attracts them or when the very indetermination of that attitude leaves a clear field to the caprices of their manifestation" (Bergson 1998, 106). Thus, Bergson describes states of bodily "indetermination" that emancipate the vast archives of involuntary memory. In *Lyrical Ballads*, recall, Wordsworth tells us that poetic composition begins with a similar state, namely "emotion recollected in tranquility." As we saw there, recollected though-affects gradually rise to the surface and resonate with various other pleasures, giving rise to new compositions.

In his poetry, Wordsworth attempts to recover the fugitive potentials of involuntary memory, his famous "spots of time/ Which with distinct preeminence retain/ A fructifying virtue,/ whence, depressed/ By trivial occupations and the round/ Of ordinary intercourse, our minds - / Especially the imaginative power – Are nourished and invisibly repaired" (LB 8 Cf. p.12; Cf. P1805 XI, 257-272). In a sense, he combines the two attitudes Bergson outlines, describing precise recollections of moments of indeterminacy conditioned by a corresponding bodily attitude. In moments of inspiration, the mob of present impressions unlocks their lost brethren, and instead of forming uniform layers, present and past combine as a splattering profusion of new hues and textures. Even deep down in muscle memory, something warps and weaves. But rhythmic strokes keep us floating on the surface, registering these convulsions as ripples rather than gashes. At a distance, we sense our creative potentials, different ways of perceiving, feeling and willing, or in Grossman's phrase, immanent counter-realities. We hear their murmuring like those distant waterfalls usually drowned out by immediate preoccupations. By describing dynamic perceptions while inducing a tranquil mood, Wordsworth returns us to the suspenseful incipience of a past still passing, renewing its indistinct qualities and allowing us to eavesdrop on a conversation of actions "ever more about to be."

In the sublime moments that so fascinate these thinkers, we encounter neither mere chaos nor an over-arching code, but rather emergent patterns at the intersection of plural forces and media. Bergson argues that the very notion of "disorder" arises from our confusion by movements between one and another kind or level of order (Bergson 1998, 274). Of course, transitions can be tough. Invoking the Darwinian fable of the cats and the clover, Walter Lippmann quips, "only a highly philosophical mouse would admit with Bergson that 'the idea of disorder objectifies for the convenience of language, the disappointment of a mind that finds before it an order different from what it wants'" (Lippmann 1930 [1925], 33). For the rest of us mice, that order is good which suits our familiar habits and expectations. However, as we have seen, Wordsworth hoped to disseminate a philosophical attitude more broadly, softening this confusion and disappointment. His poetry simulates the synaesthetic conversions of the imagination in a

pleasurable state, combining polysemic and allegorical verbage with rhythmic metrical resonances. In this light, consider another passage from *The Prelude*.

> … and I would stand
> Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
> Thence did I drink the visionary power.
> I deem not profitless these fleeting moods
> Of shadowy exaltation; not for this,
> That they are kindred to our purer mind
> And intellectual life, but that the soul –
> Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
> Remembering not – retains an obscure sense
> Of possible sublimity, to which
> With growing faculties she doth aspire,
> With faculties still growing, feeling still
> That whatsoever point they gain they still
> Have something to pursue (1799 II, 357-371).

Once more, a "shadowy exaltation" comes with a synaesthetic blend of listening, drinking and seeing. Wordsworth values these moments not in themselves, nor for what they confirm (the purer mind) but for what they promise. From sublime moments, the incompleteness of the past is recovered to enrich a sense of becoming in the present.[7]

On this reading, the miraculous powers of the imagination involve a kind of worldly transcendence, that is, a reworking of sense experience and a hence, as Wordsworth puts it, a change in *physical* nature. To be clear, the virtual is also physical, though not mechanical; its potentials are real, rather than merely possible, though like the power of the imagination Wordsworth describes, they "*might almost appear* miraculous" (My emphasis. Cf. Deleuze 1994, 208-9). As we have seen, Wordsworth suggests that we might learn to replicate the accidents that indetermine bodily attitudes while inflecting this state with pleasurable associations, and so foster poetic sensibilities among the public at large, heightening their powers of registration and composition. I believe it is something like this that the philosophers who name the virtual have in mind.

Pleasurable Associations

Appeals to the miraculous powers of the imagination, however qualified, tend to evoke the cliché of the Romantic as an irrelevant or dangerous dreamer. Thus, Carl Schmitt famously identified Romanticism with a "subjective occasionalism" that turns political ideas and situations into grist for imaginative play and therefore adapts itself to any political regime (Schmitt 1986, 16-17; See Shapiro 2008, 21-2). The latter charge, in particular, brings to mind Wordsworth's shifting political loyalties. Like Adam Müller, the primary recipient of Schmitt's condemnation, he expressed admiration for both the French Revolution and Edmund Burke, though not at the same time. A discussion of the complexities of Wordsworth's political affiliations, however, is

beyond the scope of this essay (See for example Butler, 1981). More to the point for our purposes are charges concerning the subjective, individual character of the poetic imagination. If the powers of the imagination are lodged precisely in pleasures of a body whose actions are suspended, are they purchased at the cost of a disengagement from public life?

These suspicions have a long history, and many allies. Indeed, to say as much is to paraphrase Socrates at his trial. Like their Romantic predecessors, philosophers of the virtual are sometimes accused of a solipsistic radicalism. It is easy enough find passages that justify this view. Those familiar with Massumi's book, for example, may recall the "critical" potentials he ascribes to the performance artist Stelarc's literal suspensions. Hung from hooks, or pressed tight between boards, eyes and mouth sutured, Stelarc's body is at once "passified" and "restless." It is a "body without organs" rendered obsolete to prepare for the new, "'driven by desire,' rather than by need or utility" (Massumi 2002, 108). One might also point out that Deleuze and Guattari, who coin the phrase "body without organs," select the egg as an emblem for its indetermining potentials (Ibid, 109; Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 164). Of course, these philosophers argue that to mobilize indeterminacy is to prepare transformation, and that desire acts on the world. Massumi suggests that Stelarc's "obsolete" body anticipates new instruments and environments, possibly including extraterrestrial colonization or an ecologically sustainable post capitalist economy (Massumi 2002, 108). Still, one might well wonder just how transformative these states really are, if Wordsworth achieved a similar effect with walks among the hills of the Lake District and Proust with a moistened cookie. Is all this talk of virtual multiplicities merely another tempest in a teacup?

Those critical of philosophical uncertainties more often oppose them to heroic than to tragic actions. Thus, Carl Schmitt disparages the Romantic who does not fight for his country, but only seeks to "overcome the Bonaparte that we bear in ourselves" (Schmitt 1986, 129, quoting Adam Müller). Müller's battle with his inner Bonaparte finds its counterpart in Deleuze's and Guattari's critique of subjective "microfascisms:" "It's too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 215, Cf. 163). One might retort that without microfascisms, there can be no macrofascism, that the fascist state requires fascist subjects. Indecision can be a liability, but unswerving commitment is not always a virtue. Moreover, as Bergson argues, every action involves some of each. Every dispersion is full of nascent gatherings. Still, are poetry and philosophical criticism the best means to disperse the collective passions on which fascism draws or avail them to more salutary purposes? P.M.S. Dawson, taking up the charge from the Left, finds Wordsworth's claims regarding the miraculous power of the imagination over physical nature reminiscent of the idealism Marx chastised in his 'Theses on Feuerbach.' "To rely on vision to transform the world is to be limited to transforming it in vision while leaving it untouched in reality. The Romantic assumption that the mind creates its world neglects the extent to which the converse is true" (Dawson 1993, 71).

It should already be clear that such formulations grossly oversimplify Wordsworth's understanding of relationships among the individual imagination, nature and social life. Wordsworth clearly understood the reciprocal impact of imagination and the world. In "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," for example, he describes himself as a lover not of himself, but "… of all the mighty world of eye and ear, both what they half-create,/And what

perceive; well pleased to recognise/ In nature and the language of sense,/The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,/The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul/Of all my moral being" (LB, 92-3). In *The Prelude*, he describes his infant self as an "inmate of this *active* universe … creator and receiver both,/Working but in alliance with the works Which it beholds" (P1799 II, 296-305. Italics in original).[8] For Deleuze, likewise, creative activity (indetermination) encompasses self and world. "The entire world is an egg … A living being is not only defined genetically, by the dynamisms which determine its internal milieu, but also ecologically, by the external movements which preside over its distribution within an extensity" (Deleuze 1994, 216). As we have seen, the imagination expands precisely when one capacity to be moved by the world, to register its nuanced fluxuations, *increases*. It is enabled not by a suspension of worldly engagement *per se*, but a substitution of complex delights for gross stimulants. Flights of imagination are not opposed to worldly concerns but only to gross measures of desire and utility. At the time Wordsworth wrote, such gross measures were ascendant in the utilitarian philosophy of Bentham and the emergent science of political economy. Indeed, the latter's simplification of human aspirations were a primary object of Romantic criticism (See Bronk, 2009). Thus Schiller laments, "Utility is the great idol of our age, to which all powers are in thrall and to which all talent must pay homage. Weighed in this crude balance, the insubstantial merits of Art scarce tip the scale …" (Schiller 1967, 7).

To argue for the social value of a critique of utility may seem oxymoronic. Yet as is often the case, superficial contradictions mask subtler differences and commonalities. Although he rejected crude measures of utility, Wordsworth was deeply concerned with the social context and impact of his poetics. Indeed, he claims this concern distinguishes the strategy of *Lyrical Ballads* from that of prevailing genres, namely, "… that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (LB, 9). As we have seen, he conceives the imagination not as a generic or universal attribute, but an elastic capacity modified by historically specific circumstances. It can be dulled by rote labor, overwhelmed by urban crowds and crass literature, or, he hoped, enhanced by certain kinds of poetry. He seeks not only to exhibits the powers of his imagination but also to remediate a human sensorium compromised by modern, especially urban life. Further, recall, he suggests that by enhancing the public's powers of imagination we might also enhance the "multiplicity and quality of its moral relations." The point, in short, is not to suspend judgment and decision altogether, but to temper their rashness and to expand the range of sympathetic encounter.

Sentimental and Social Education in *The Prelude*

How is the complex delight of poetic inspiration linked to the extension of social sympathies? We find clues in Wordsworth's reflections on the origins of his own poetic genius. In *The Prelude,* Wordsworth's extensive reflections on the origins of his poetic genius – written and revised in three editions over five decades – he describes his imagination as both cause and consequence of sympathetic relationships. He declares it "hard to analyze a soul, in which/Not only general habits and desires,/But each most obvious and particular thought -/Not in a mystical and idle sense,/But in the words of reason deeply weighed -/Hath no beginning" (P1799 II, 232-236). If the poetic sensibility has no beginning, this not because it arises *ex nihilo*, but rather because neither it nor the individual in which it emerges begins from nothing, but instead from the intercourse of multiple agents. The sensorium Wordsworth describes is as much a

composition as a composer. He writes, "The mind of man is framed even like the breath/ And harmony of music. There is a dark/ Invisible workmanship that reconciles/Discordant elements and makes them move/In one society" (P1805 I, 352-355).[9] What harmonizes diverse forces is not a subject but a process, not a worker but a workmanship. Though its ultimate origins remain uncertain, it clearly requires collaboration among many instruments and players.

Throughout different editions of the poem, Wordsworth attributes his poetic sensibilities variously to inborn gifts, early registrations of natural forces (e.g. the Derwent river) and human affections, influences that work more often in concert than in series. Moreover, these sensibilities are not a constant companion, but sometimes aroused and other times oppressed. *The Prelude* can be read as a catalogue of these experiences accompanied by reflections on common patterns they exhibit. To begin with, the process by which the infant composes an objective world from a multitude of impressions is conditioned by the loving touch of his mother.

> Subject to the discipline of love,
> His organs and recipient faculties
> Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads,
> tenacious of the forms which it receives.
> In one beloved presence – nay and more,
> In that most apprehensive habitude
> And those sensations which have been derived
> From this beloved presence – there exists
> A virtue which irradiates and exalts
> All objects through all intercourse of sense
> […] Such, verily, is the first
> Poetic spirit of our human life –
> By uniform control of after years
> In most abated and suppressed, in some
> Through every change of growth or decay
> Preeminent until death (P1799II, 281-310).

As Wordsworth argued in *Lyrical Ballads*, ideas are differently composed in different affective milieu, and pleasurable sensations heighten the nuanced registrations that characterize a poetic spirit. Thus, the loving touch of his mother "irradiates" the apprehension of the world through the synaesthetic "intercourse" of his senses. Similarly, the sound of the river blends with his nurses song to "Make ceaseless music through the night and day/Which with its steady cadence tempering/Our human waywardness, composed my thoughts to more than infant softness" (P1799 I, 9-13; P1805, 279-282).

In his mother's arms, Wordsworth finds the first gentle rhythms that soothe the chaos of an excited sensorium. As he suggests, we all begin with a poetic spirit.[10] Over time, however, the playful mimesis of body and world is inhibited by trauma or dampened by "uniform control." Wordsworth is among the privileged few who retain some of their infantile wonder. He continues, "the props of my affection were removed,/And yet the building stood, as if sustained/by its own spirit. All that I beheld/Was dear to me, and from this cause it came/That

now to Nature's finer influxes/ My mind lay open…" (P1799 II, 324-333). Apron strings cut, Wordsworth's poetic spirit stands "as if" on its own power. Nonetheless, his adult powers of imagination – still identified with a greater capacity to be affected by the "finer influxes" of worldly forces – also benefits from good company. His exalted wanderings in nature, he tells us, were "more dear/For this, that one was by my side, a friend/Then passionately loved" (P1799 II. 381-3).

Wordsworth's poetic intercourse with the myriad objects and forces of nature not only is enhanced by human affection, but also predisposes him to the pleasures of human society, as indicated by the heading for Book Eight of *The Prelude*, "*Retrospect – Love of Nature Leading To Love of Man*" (P1805/1850 VIII). The same tranquil state that emancipates the imagination opens us to the "the listless sense, Quiescent and disposed to sympathy" (P1805 IV, 379-380**).** Wordsworth thus traces a triangular relationship between nature, imagination and fraternity whereby poetic sensibilities are induced, sustained and communicated.

> Hence life, and change, and beauty, solitude
> More active even than 'best society,'
> Society made sweet as solitude
> By silent inobtrusive sympathies,
> And gentle agitations of the mind
> From manifold distinctions, difference
> Perceived in things where to the common eye
> No difference is, and hence, from the same source,
> Sublimer joy […] (P1799 II, 343-351).

In these passages, the heightened sensitivity to a multitude of "minuter properties" and "modes and temporary qualities" comes with pleasures both solitary and social. Disarmed by a pleasing touch, the young poet opens to communion with the manifold impressions of nature. In turn, the complex delight he finds among the birds, winds and waters sensitizes him to the nuances of other men and women, extending his sympathies through an enhanced appreciation for affinities and differences between his passions and volitions and those of other living beings.

The Poverty of Experience and the Experience of Poverty

Recall that in his *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth proposed to extend our sympathies in like manner, by bringing poetry to the situations and experiences of the lower classes. In the poems he contributed to the volume, his imagination is inspired as much by the lives of the "abject poor" as by sublime nature. Before addressing suspicions about their conflation, we can observe their relationship in the poems themselves. Consider, for example, 'The Cumberland Beggar.' In this poem, Wordsworth again links the emancipation of thought and feeling to the extension of social sympathies. Take the excerpt with which we began,

> Wher'er the aged Beggar takes his rounds,
> The mild necessity of use compels
> To acts of love; and habit does the work
> Of reason, yet prepares that after joy

> Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
> By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursu'd
> Doth find itself insensibly dispos'd
> To virtue and true goodness … (LB, 147)

Faced with the simple needs (mild necessity) of the beggar, his benefactors are both moved to a spontaneous act of charity and liberated from egoistic preoccupations. The beggar's rounds thus "prompt the unletter'd villagers to tender offices and pensive thoughts' (LB, 149). As Wordsworth suggests, reason cherishes an "after joy," which I implicitly hyphenate and so take to mean the persistence of that pleasure he elsewhere describes as the "great spring" of mental activity (*Op cit*). Likewise, he argues in his Preface, "We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure" (LB, 18).

Once again, sympathetic encounters are as much the cause as the effect of imaginative capacities. Like Wordsworth's publications, the rounds of the beggar distribute a philosophical attitude through a gentle displacement of instrumental reasoning. Reinforcing this view and echoing his description of his mother's affections in *The Prelude*, Wordsworth speculates in *The Cumberland Beggar* that his own disposition toward "sympathy and thought" may have been sparked by "that first mild touch" (LB, 148). As he makes clear, sympathies are thereby extended beyond not only selfish concerns but also the narrow boundaries of organic community. Regular loving relations with family and blood are a 'cold abstinence from evil deeds, inevitable charities,' and not enough to 'satisfy the human soul' (LB 148; Cf. P1799 I, 454). With the rounds of the beggar, nonetheless, this estrangement is made regular, or better, rhythmic. His recurrent appearances leaven our everyday concerns with gentle interruptions. In these intervals, we are not given a chance to rationally order our desires or evaluate others' demands, but to learn from them of pleasure unpursued. Momentarily emancipated from numbing, routine gratifications by the needs and pleasures of others, we recover our capacity to be moved by quieter counter-pleasures.

Wordsworth thus finds common power in internal illumination and outward fellowship. Or, rather, he describes a harmonic resonance between sympathetic social encounters and poetic inspiration, whereby each amplifies the other. Perhaps his poetry can encourage us to receive the beggar, who may then more easily and rapidly communicates the sentiments literature works so hard to impart (LB, 147). Dawson might still object that this goes about it backwards, that an enlarged imagination cannot be promoted until its socio-economic obstacles have been removed, or more crudely, that one must work on the base rather than the superstructure. However, Wordsworth's poetics – and Marx's dialectics, for that matter – suggest a more dynamic causal relationship between social life and the powers of the imagination, obviating false choices between economic reforms and the winning of hearts and minds. Wordsworth does not treat his poetry as a substitute for social reform. In *The Cumberland Beggar*, he adds an explicitly political gesture (a rarity for him), demanding recognition of the beggar for his aesthetic and moral rather than economic utility.

> Him even the slow-pac'd waggon leaves behind.
> But deem not this man useless. -Statesman! Ye
> Who are so restless in your wisdom, ye

> Who have a broom still ready in your hands
> To rid the world of nuisances… deem him not
> A burthen of the earth. […] the Villagers in him
> Behold a record which together binds
> Past deeds and offices of charity
> Else unremember'd, and so keeps alive
> The kindly mood in hearts which lapse of years
> And that half-wisdom half-experience gives
> Make slow to feel, and by sure steps resign
> To selfishness and cold oblivious cares (LB, 146-7).

The beggar, for Wordsworth, is an emblem of that listless sense threatened by the maximizing logics of political economy in rapidly industrializing world. In reflections on his work dictated to Isabella Fenwick in 1843, Wordsworth explains: "The political economists were about that time beginning their war upon mendicity in all its forms & by implication, if not directly, on Alms-giving also. This heartless process has been carried as far as it can go by the AMENDED poor-law bill [of 1834] …" (Ibid, 296).

It may trouble us that Wordsworth treats the beggar primarily as a means, a source of emotional satisfaction for those who give alms, even if he insists that the "poorest poor" gain most from their own small acts of generosity (Cf. Konow and Earley, 2008). But it is not only for others' benefit that Wordsworth exhorts us to leave the beggar to wander outdoors, "struggle with frosty air and winter snows," and finally to let him die. The alternative he rejected was to confine him in 'industry' and blot out his silence (149). To condemn the beggar to the workhouse (today, we might say workfare) would rob him of his small pleasures, the songs of birds that penetrate his isolation and the light of the sun that enters his downcast eyes. And to rob people of pleasure unpursued is to rob them of their capacity not only to receive but also to cast light. "From Nature doth emotion come, and mood/Of calmness equally are Nature's gift … Hence it is/That genius, which exists by interchange/Of peace and excitation, find in her/ His best and purest friend … Such benefit may souls of humble frame/Partake of, each in their degree" (P1805 XII, 1-16). Commenting on these lines, Alexander Cappon writes,

> In referring here to the humblest people, Wordsworth may seem patronizing. But he is finding a place of importance for all people in his philosophy – a place of importance connected, indeed, which what he regards as the highest principle of change in humanity: the generative principle. In the passage we have quoted there is a key to the democracy of his acceptance of his fellow human beings" (Cappon, 94).

True, we could say that Wordsworth's portrait of the beggar romanticizes a poverty that should be relieved rather than celebrated. However, we could also draw a different lesson, namely that the lives of others deserve support even, or especially, when they have no measurable economic value. We might also gather that public access to green spaces is one means of such support, and that the segregation of different classes harms not only the less fortunate. Other poems, such as 'The Female Vagrant' and 'The Convict' also dwell on the sufferings imposed by the rich and powerful on the poor and the condemned, extending our sympathy with the latter by making their

suffering poignant and bearable while also encouraging us to dwell on the intimate bonds between our intellectual and emotional capacities, our moral conventions and our material security. For its sympathetic portraits of the lower classes, and for its claims regarding their common powers of sense and imagination, *Lyrical Ballads* was taken by contemporary authorities as a revolutionary document. Despite its preoccupation with traditional life and its clear departure from the rationalist universalism espoused by radical groups at the time, it communicated an emotional affinity with democratic aspirations (See Butler, 37-8).

Wordsworth in Town

Regardless of its debatable significance in its own time, we may well question the relevance of a poetry most at home in the quaint English countryside for contemporary urban life. The Cumberland Beggar is no snarling, meth-addicted sex offender. But then again, neither are the homeless in cities today, contrary to what we see on our near-ubiquitous 'Law and Order' crime dramas. In downtown neighborhoods, non-threatening encounters with local homeless people are still quite common. Moreover, as Wordsworth explains in his *Preface*, it was precisely the obstacles posed to our imagination and sympathies by industrial labor, urban life and prurient entertainments that he sought to overcome. He meant his poetry as a technique for democratizing the imagination, a means to pleasurably enhance our capacity to be moved by the finer qualities not only of nature but also of fellow citizens.

Urban life did pose severe challenges to Wordsworth's poetic sensibilities. We witness his ambivalent struggle with these challenges in books seven and eight of the *Prelude*, where he brings us along on his visits to the commercial centers of Cambridge and London.[11] More suburban tourist than aloof flaneur, he is initially overwhelmed by unfathomable, raucous crowds, ubiquitous advertising for trivial commodities, and pitiful abjections. Seeking protection from painful excitements, his imagination and sympathies contract. In Cambridge, "… for the first time in my life … [I] Saw woman as she is open to shame/Abandoned, and the pride of public vice. Full surely from the bottom of my heart I shuddered; but the pain was almost lost,/ Absorbed and buried in the immensity/Of the effect: a barrier seemed at once/Thrown in, that from humanity divorced/The human form, splitting the race of man/In twain, yet leaving the same outward shape" (P1805VII, 417-427). If this still seems quaint, come along to nineteenth century London in the throes of industrial and political revolution.[12]

> […] What say you then
> To times when half the city shall break out
> Full of one passion – vengeance, rage or fear –
> To executions, to a street on fire,
> Mobs, riots, or rejoicings? From those sights
> Take one, an annual festival, the fair
> Holden were martyrs suffered in past time,
> And named of St Bartholomew, there see
> A work that's finished to our hands, that lays,
> If any spectacle on earth can do,
> The whole creative powers of man asleep (P1805 VII, 645-655).

And yet, Wordsworth does not withdraw into himself or fade to black. Instead he calls his Muse and takes us "wafted on her wings/Above the press and danger of the crowd – Upon some showman's platform …" for a view from above. It does not make for a pretty scene. "What a hell/ for eyes and ears, what anarchy and din/ Barbarian and infernal – 'tis a dream/Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight sound … the crowd/Inviting; with buffoons against buffoons/ Grimacing, writhing, screaming … All jumbled up together to make/This parliament of monsters …" (P1805 VII, 659-692). How are we to relate to such monsters? Amidst the mayhem, we get a few caricatured close-ups, "… him who grinds the hurdy-gurdy… him who at the trumpet puffs his cheeks,/The silver-collared negro with his timbrel ..." This became an increasingly popular way to represent the thousands of living beings we cannot comprehend whole, namely, by reducing them to a manageable number of stereotypes, the physiognomies of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries that anticipate the more systematic taxonomies of commercial and political demographers. Yet in a now predictable twist, just when all seems lost, Wordsworth's imagination catches a break.

> O blank confusion…
> An indistinguishable world to men,
> The slaves unrespite of low pursuits,
> Living amid the same perpetual flow of trivial objects, melted and reduced
> To one identity by differences
> That have no law, no meaning and no end –
> Oppression under which even the highest minds
> Must labor, whence the strongest are not free
> But though the picture weary out the eye,
> By nature an unmanageable sight,
> it is not wholly so to him who looks
> In steadiness, who hath among least things
> An under-sense of the greatest, sees the parts
> As parts, but with a feeling of the whole (P1805 VII, 696-713).

Wordsworth carries this under-sense for distant harmonies, the echo of "the mountain's outline" into the crowd (Ibid. 724). He writes, "the spirit of Nature was upon me here,/The soul of beauty and enduring life/ Was present as a habit, and diffused - /Through meager lines and colours, and the press/Of self-destroying transitory things – Composure and ennobling harmony" (Ibid. 736-741). Just what this harmony looks like, we cannot say. I t is, after all, an "under-sense," not a composition but a state of composure that ennobles. "Neither guilt nor vice,/ Debasement… could overthrow my trust/ In what we may become…" (P1805 VIII, 308).

Once again, a dynamic flux of impressions gives way to a state of suspense, followed in turn by poetic inspiration. But here the communion is social, the becoming collective. In his analysis of the "moments of blockage" typical of these sublime scenarios, briefly discussed above, Hertz highlights a similar encounter with shared potentials in a preceding scene from the same book of the *Prelude.* Overcome by the unknowable multitude of passing faces in the crowded streets, Wordsworth loses "all the ballast of familiar life." In this instance, however, it is not some inner muse, but another beggar who brings him face to face, as it were, with what does not (yet) exist.

> … lost/ Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance
> Abruptly to be smitten with the view
> of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,
> Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest
> Wearing a written paper, to explain
> The story of the man, and who he was.
> My mind did at this spectacle turn round
> As with the might of waters, and it seemed
> To me that in this label was a type
> Or emblem of the utmost that we know
> Both of ourselves and of the universe,
> And on the shape of this unmoving man,
> His fixed face and sightless eyes, I looked,
> As if admonished from another world" (P1805 VII, 609-623).

As Hertz argues, the blind beggar halts a bewildering rush of impressions, arresting our imagination at the pivot between mystery and sense. In the still face of this stranger whose story is dwarfed by the silence of him who bears it, Wordsworth finds a figure for hidden intensities that humble – and so make poignant and tender – the quotidian life behind which they loom. We encounter in this old man a cipher of a shared blindness, the myopic narrowing of our impressions by useful shorthand. Such are the fragile structures we build for ourselves on the "base of outward things" (Ibid. 624).

As we have seen, however, outward things also provide the resources for our interiors. In a passage between his encounter with the blind beggar and the chaos of St Bartholomew, Wordsworth contemplates gentler sides of the city. "Scenes different there are-/Full-Formed – Which take, with small internal help,/Possession of the faculties …" He fears that these moments of tranquility, the rainy winter streets deserted but for a few quiet voices, are "falsely catalogued," overwhelmed by the madness that follows (Ibid. 626-644). And yet as we have seen, imagination survives in the last instance, sustained by the powers of his personal recollections of sublimity and those occasional precious scenes of human love – say, an infant gently exposed to sun and fresh air in the brawny arms of a laborer – that inspire delight in mankind more generally (See P1805 VIII, 844-859).

Passing Wordsworth

Wordsworth had some hope for his parliament of monsters, though his faith in their potential waxed and waned along with his powers of imagination. Instilled with a presentiment for subtle harmonies, he manages the chaos of his own reactions to the spectacles urban life offers. With his poetry, he tries to communicate the same capacity to his readers, preparing them for more nuanced perceptions and less rash decisions. Nonetheless, his snapshots of London leave us doubtful he could find many readers there. If the poetic education of *Lyrical Ballads* requires readers "possessed of much sensibility," it would appear to find little purchase at the fairground. So much there is monstrous, so little tender. In later years, Wordsworth turned increasingly to Church and State, those more conventional and grander emblems of collective power.

Perhaps we simply need poets less averse to crowds. William James suggests this departure in his delightful essay, 'On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings.' The blindness in question is the veil that selfish concerns draw over our inner life, along with the "recondite pleasure" of others in seemingly drab pursuits (see James, 18-19). Like Wordsworth, he opposes poetic vision to egoistic, utilitarian calculation.

> Yet so blind and dead does the clamor of our own practical interests make us to all other things, that it seems almost as if it were necessary to become worthless as a practical being, if one is to hope to attain to any breadth of insight into the impersonal world of worths as such, to have any perception of life's meaning on a large objective scale. Only our mystic, your dreamer, or your insolvent tramp or loafer, can afford so sympathetic an occupation, an occupation which will change the usual standards of human value in the twinkling of an eye, giving to foolishness a place ahead of power, and laying low in a minute the distinctions which it takes a hard-working conventional man a lifetime to build up. You may be a prophet, at this rate; but you cannot be a worldly success (25-6).

Quoting Stevenson, James affirms "the true realism … is that of the poets: to find out where joy resides, and give it a voice beyond singing. 'For to miss the joy is to miss all. In the joy of the actors lies the sense of any action'" (James 1899, 16). By unveiling the rich sentiments with which others' lives are imbued, poetry enhances our sympathetic appreciation for their different ways of life and expands our own potential enjoyments.

While he affirms the social virtues of poetry, James credits Walt Whitman rather than Wordsworth for a poetic irradiation of urban life. He declares of Whitman, "He felt the human crowd as rapturously as Wordsworth felt the mountains" (James 1889, 26). This comparison can certainly be complicated on both sides. Natural forces and human masses exchange places as figures in the poetry of both authors. Wordsworth looks upon the follies in London streets as on "daisies swarming through the fields in June," and Whitman basks in "the splendor, picturesqueness, and oceanic amplitude and rush of these great cities" (P1805 VII, 588; Whitman 1996, 962). Indeed, Hertz describes some passages of *The Prelude* as "Whitmanesque" (Hertz 1985, 56). In the same pages, Raymond Williams finds a precedent for modern art's approach to the crowd (Hertz 58; Williams, 39). I leave to others a closer study of the complicated relationship between the two poets (See, for example, Moores, 2006). That said, most would allow that Whitman needed less prompting to extend his love from nature to man. Indeed, he makes this his explicit project in the first sentence of his 'Democratic Vistas.' Much as Wordsworth prepares us for a pleasurable encounter with disordered scenes from everyday life, Whitman infuses the fast-flowing diversities of urban life with pleasurable resonances. As was the case with Wordsworth's poetry, these pleasures are both described and enacted. Thus, Michael Warner argues that Whitman's poetry "links its erotics of self-abandonment to its own perverse publicity, to its use of a print public-sphere mode of address. (Warner 2002, 287). However, once again, the self is not simply absorbed by pleasurable impressions, but composes new relations from their midst. Warner compares the tension between self-mastery and self-abandonment in Whitman's writings to that in the rhetoric of addiction of the temperance movement (for which Whitman composed an ostensibly didactic novel). In that rhetoric, entering the public enhances our will (via collective action). It does not so much remove as

supplant alcohol as a "figure for self-incoherence" (Ibid, 282). One could say that Whitman's alcohol, so understood, is a love potion, or Wordsworth's Meter. It gives estrangement a pleasant buzz. Along similar lines, Jason Frank has recently argued that the dissemination of Whitman's poetry promotes a similar abandon, that it "cruises" its readers, using eros to draw them in and add pleasure to the literary gymnastics that prepares them for democratic exercises (Frank, forthcoming).

All of these thinkers understand the small miracles language can work without therefore forgetting the obstacles it faces. James, for example, demonstrates his earlier point regarding the limits of our imagination with his own rather cynical assessment of the interior life of the common man Whitman rhapsodized. "*His* fancy does not thus 'soar away into the colors of the sunset' as did Whitman's, nor does he inwardly realize at all the indisputable fact that this world never did anywhere or at any time contain more of essential divinity, or of eternal meaning, than is embodied in the fields of vision over which his eyes so carelessly pass" (James, 32). James then confirms Wordsworth's suggestion that a liberation of sensitivity requires a sentimental inspiration. "But how can one attain to the feeling of the vital significance of an experience, if one have it not to begin with?" (James, 33).

Wordsworth, we know, believed poetry could communicate a feeing for vitality even among those in whom it was diminished by the pressures and routines of modern life. Poetry is no longer a popular genre, and print itself may be losing ground, but more recent thinkers follow the spirit if not the letter of the poets and find other means to combine critical feelings and pleasurable associations. John Dewey assigned the task of fulfilling Whitman's democratic prophecy to the modern artist. "Artists have always been the real purveyors of news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception and appreciation" (Dewey, 184). Walter Benjamin, similarly, suggested that modern media (film, in particular) might be adapted to disseminate a combination of criticism and pleasure (See Shapiro, 2003). In his study of changing social relationships in Times Square, Samuel Delany recommends architectural reforms that facilitate pleasurable contact among strangers (Delany 1999). William Connolly, who has done most to bring philosophies of the virtual to bear on contemporary political struggles, suggests a wide range of techniques might be adopted to modify affects in the service of a generous disposition toward emergent lifestyles and identities (See Connolly 2005, 2008 and various). As I have argued, Wordsworth can be included among those who serve as a precedent and a resource for these thinkers, for his appreciation of the role of pleasure in thought and action and for the techniques he models for cultivating critical feelings and pleasurable associations in modern, democratic societies.

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Notes

[1] This focus also leads McSweeney to focus on those passages where Wordsworth's figures his sensuous apprehensions with "drinking," as when the boy "drinks the visionary power" (60-61. Cf. P1805VI, 383). For him, the experience to which Wordsworth returns is "… the primal imbibing of the child at the mother's breast." (Ibid)

[2] McSweeney mistakenly aligns de Man's reading with Harold Bloom's and Geoffrey Hartman's depiction of a transcendent or "apocalyptic" power of imagination liberated from the natural, a view against which de Man expressly distinguishes his own (See McSweeney, 46; de Man 90-91).

[3] The Clovers, 'Love Potion #9.' http://www.allthelyrics.com/lyrics/the_clovers/love_potion_number_nine-lyrics-449135.html (Accessed 10/4/09)

[4] Tone Loc, 'Funky Cold Medina.' http://www.asklyrics.com/display/tone-loc/funky-cold-medina-lyrics.htm (Accessed 10/4/09)

[5] She writes, "…to enter Spinoza's conatus under the sign of Burke is to put a reverse spin on Wordsworth's Burkean politics, switching the rotation from right to left, and to a different and more radical left than that of Paine, et al." (Levinson 2007, 9).

[6] As Alexander Cappon has argued, Wordsworth's description of this process also bear a strong resemblance with Whiteheads account of "prehension, […] the grasping into unity of a pattern of aspects" (Cappon 1985, 48-9).

[7] The editors of the Norton edition of *The Prelude* redescribe Wordsworth's references to both "ghostly" and "intellectual life" as "spiritual" (23 fn.3, 5). But ghosts are not merely "disembodied," as they put it. Rather, they are indistinct apparitions of bodies whose existence lies in the past. In fairness, the editors acknowledge in the subsequent passage that the power superadded to immediate impressions is "not at all clearly defined." As we have seen, this indistinct quality is what allows recollected sense (memories of how but not what the soul felt) to combine past with present and modify patterns of thought and feeling. The editors write, "The 'soul' is 'superadded' to the inherent qualities of landscape, and yet 'comes' to Wordsworth, rather than being, as one would expect, projected by him in a mood of 'shadowy exaltation'" (23 fn.7). One would expect such additions to be projected, however, only if recollections were voluntary and the imagination autonomous, expectations encouraged by M.H. Abrams famous depiction of Enlightenment and Romantic *epistemes* as "mirror and lamp," respectively (See Abrams, 1953). But fugitive aspects of the past do indeed "come" to us, as the colloquial expression has it, in conjunction with evocative objects and impressions. Paradoxically, but also practically, we can encourage their arrival by focusing our attention elsewhere, distracting ourselves from blocked attempts to call them up.

[8] Admittedly, Wordsworth sometimes credits the mind with more than half the powers of creation. In book XI of the 1805 Prelude, he associates the spots of time with "the deepest feeling that the mind/ Is lord and master, and that outward sense/ Is but the obedient servant of her will" (270-272).

[9] In the 1850 edition, the discordant elements no longer "move" but instead "cling" together, and Wordsworth begins the stanza with an extra reference to "the immortal spirit" (P1850, 340-343).

[10] Recent brain studies concur. See Alison Gopnik, "Your Baby Is Smarter Than You Think," NYtimes August 15, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/opinion/16gopnik.html?_r=1&em (Accessed 8/16/09). "Brains work because neurons are connected to one another, allowing them to communicate. Baby brains have many more neural connections than adult brains. But they are much less efficient. Over time, we prune away the connections we don't use, and the remaining ones become faster and more automatic."

[11] P.M.S. Dawson notes that many Romantics shared this ambivalence. "The Romantic attitude to industrialism can be caricatured as an aesthetic distaste for smoking chimneys and nosy factories […] In actual fact the Romantic imagination responded powerfully if ambivalently to the sublimity of the new industrial landscape" (Dawson, 67).

[12] Wordsworth may have been among those alarmed at mob violence in the late 18th century, such as the Gordon Riots of 1780 (See Dawson, 53).