

Note to the Workshop Participants:

This paper is very much the result of an experimental idea. It may be considered, at worst, a profoundly confused failure or, at best, a novel idea that could, for a few minutes, be tolerably entertained. It grew from my interest in the concept of “speed” in poetry, in the poetry of Shelley especially, and it later transmogrified into a paper that, dare I say, *swiftly* grew in theoretical ambition and scale—a delta of interfering currents assembled out of the interpretative panic that a complicated poem like *The Triumph of Life* produced.

My main interest in submitting this paper to your attention is to determine whether, firstly, it makes a coherent and readable argument, and secondly, whether there is any way of cutting down the paper’s size—or alternately whether there is any one section that must be elaborated upon. Perhaps the most readily recognizable problem is that of its dense tripartite schematic: “dromoscopy,” “holography,” and what I call “Lucretian optics”. It is my suspicion that any one of these concerns could have been advantageously discoursed upon without the need for bringing in the other two—but the problem of the paper’s form revolves around the conceit that these three hermeneutical fields feed into and arise out of each other—and so the problem of what may be an unnecessary imbrication stands out foremost.

Despite the current lengthiness of the paper (42 pages), I have tried to cut it down by omitting one section (“IV: From Dromoscopy to Holography”) and cutting out a few pages from others. If the paper appears too long to read and you are too pressed for time, I would advise just reading Parts I (pp. 2-17) and III, V (pp. 23-43), skipping all that lies between—Part V is the most experimental section since it offers an extended moment of a peculiar form of close-reading.

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## Shelley in 3D: Dromoscopy, Holography, & Lucretian Optics in *The Triumph of Life*

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### I. Speed and Light: Technologies of Reading in *The Triumph of Life*

It has become quite difficult to open a discourse on Percy Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* without first relating it, in some indirect fashion, to the alternately monumentalized/decentralized reading Paul de Man gave it in "Shelley Disfigured" (1979).<sup>1</sup> Two critics, Nancy Moore Goslee and Hugh Roberts, do just that in their respective analyses of *The Triumph of Life*.<sup>2</sup> Goslee writes that "the argument [de Man] builds, an argument still haunting, if not dominating, critics of the poem almost thirty years after its appearance, turns not on embodiment or material process but upon language and representation. Or, rather, it argues for the continual disruption, fragmentation, and inadequacy of representation to refer to any world existing beyond the linguistic chain of signifiers."<sup>3</sup> Goslee counters de Man's linguistic (and stubbornly ahistorical) skepticism by re-centering her discourse on the material objectivity and groundedness of the notebooks, manuscripts, and marginalia Shelley left behind, with particular emphasis on the folios Shelley had used during the composition of *The Triumph of Life*; these traces of Shelley's revisions and compositional habits, Goslee avers, could provide an aggregating window to the same pluralities de Man categorized in reverse manner as the proliferation of interrogative lacunae or aporias. Goslee cites Shelley's famous statement

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<sup>1</sup>De Man's essay first appeared in the by now canonical *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979). I will however be citing the version present in the collection *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>Goslee devotes a chapter to *The Triumph of Life* ("The Triumph of Life: figure, history, and inscription," pp. 186-217) in *Shelley's Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Roberts' *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) is fairly massive and spreads itself across all of Shelley's career and the major critical analyses of the poems; *Triumph of Life* is mainly discussed in two separate sections, pp. 198-223, 397-407.

<sup>3</sup>Goslee, *Shelley's Visual Imagination*, p. 186; Goslee quotes Frances Ferguson to support her claim that de Man sabotages the possibility of a traditional or philological critique of Shelley's poem by exploiting the poem's unfinishedness as an inescapable conditionality, and proof for the essential opacity of the literary text: "The de Manian textual turn...insists that language disarticulates bodies--prevents individual humans from being able to present their thoughts as the inner contents of their bodies to others in apprehensible form--because language has a body of its own. [...] "Thus 'the deconstructive portrayal of language,' by generalizing from literary uses of language, 'has seemed to make it impossible to sustain traditional accounts of an author who has responsibility for the meaning of a literary work'" (quoted by Goslee, p. 7, from Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* [New York and London: Routledge, 1992], p. 12)

in *The Defence of Poetry* that “the mind in creation is as a fading coal...which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakes to transitory brightness... Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results: but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline.” Goslee contends that while the statement seems to fatally mark the “materializing of the work as a fall or loss,” nevertheless these compositional “draft notebooks retain an astonishing archive of material evidence for a fanning of these coals into new flame as Shelley’s original, often fragmentary, drafts metamorphose into later ones, into fair copies, and into printed form.”<sup>4</sup> Taking seriously W.J.T. Mitchell’s theorization of the “pictorial turn”<sup>5</sup> as a productive countermand to the discourse-effacing, anti-historicist methodologies of Deconstructionism and the “linguistic turn,” Goslee distinguishes Shelley’s “visual imagination” (captured in the sketches, drawings, and “imagetexts” modeled by and included in Shelley’s drafts and notebooks) as a viable hermeneutic that answers and accounts for the de Manian problem of bodily erasure and semiotic disfiguration.<sup>6</sup>

Roberts, on the other hand, confronts de Man’s reading in a different way. Not indifferent to historicizing the epistemological development of Shelley’s thought and particularly the poet’s ideas on the oppositional “two thoughts” of a science-infused post-Enlightenment skepticism and a revolutionary logopoeic idealism, Roberts usurps de Man’s deconstructive model and enhances its insights into the narrative structure of *The Triumph of Life* by relating them to the modern day advances of chaos theory and thermodynamics. Regarded from this angle, Shelley’s concern for the durability of the “invisible influence [which] like an inconstant wind awakes to transitory brightness” the “fading coal” of the “mind in creation” comes to adumbrate the key problematic of constructing, maintaining, and improving thermodynamic engines. If we were to exchange the terms “composition” for heat-

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<sup>4</sup>Shelley’s *Visual Imagination*, p. 10

<sup>5</sup>See Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 11-34 (“The Pictorial Turn”)

<sup>6</sup>Goslee seeks to establish a relationship “between these notebook drafts as visual objects with text elements, as iconotexts and imagetexts,” an interdisciplinary move that effectively analyzes “the often evanescent, shifting visualites of text and image” and grounds itself on the solidity of Shelley’s “technologies...of the visible”: “As the visible is evoked, destabilized, and recast, his texts both overthrow idols and posit new ideals--emergent truths that are no longer voiceless or imageless yet are still subject to Demogorgon-like skepticism” (*Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, pp. 16, 27).

generation, “inspiration” for heat-fuel and “decline” for entropy, Shelley’s statement that “when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline” limns quite neatly the second law of thermodynamics. The analogism of poetic revelation/composition to mechanical engineering and the *techné* of systems-production isn’t so promiscuous or anachronistic if one remembers that only two years after Shelley’s death (marked by the aborted completion of *The Triumph of Life*), Sadi Carnot developed the first theoretical thermodynamic system, the “Carnot heat engine,” in 1824. Indeed, some of Shelley’s mechanistic ideas of the human mind as a type of heat-fueled perceptual machine that does not “create [but only] perceive[s],”<sup>7</sup> and his description of the human organism as “an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre,”<sup>8</sup> rhyme with the emergent technologism and the return of “energy” (kinetic, potential, social, etc.) as a controlling principle of physics during the nineteenth century. As Barri J. Gold puts it, “somewhere between Blake and Albert Einstein, *energy* took on new meaning.”<sup>9</sup>

But Roberts, interestingly, goes even further and manages to extrapolate what he calls a “chaotic theory of social reproduction” in Shelley’s poetics from a variety of sources, namely the widespread and deeply embedded influence Lucretius, Epicurean thought, and *De rerum natura* had on Shelley’s philosophy of composition. “Drawing principally on the work of Michel Serres,”<sup>10</sup> Roberts shows “how...concepts [of chaos science/complex dynamics] relate to Lucretian physics,” and in turn demonstrates how “this altered understanding of Lucretius offers us new insights into Shelley’s use of him.”<sup>11</sup> For Roberts, the recuperation of “Lucretian physics” via the modern optic of chaos science and thermodynamic systems usefully recontextualizes and resolves some of the critical tension latent in the discussion of Shelley’s

<sup>7</sup>See especially “A Refutation of Deism” (*Shelley’s Prose*, p. 136). Permutations of this Humean idea arise as early as in “The Necessity of Atheism” and as late as in “A Defence of Poetry”.

<sup>8</sup>“A Defence of Poetry,” in *Shelley’s Prose*, p. 277

<sup>9</sup>Gold’s *Thermopoetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010) covers precisely this area of inquiry that I am attempting to delineate here. Though his text does not deal with Shelley’s poetry at all (only one mention of “Adonais” is made), Gold does attempt something the same with Tennyson’s work. See especially Part One, “The Consolation of Physics,” pp. 3-67.

<sup>10</sup>The principal text by Serres that Roberts draws from is *La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrece* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977), but for my own citations I shall be strictly keeping to Serres’ shorter essay “Lucretius: Science and Religion” (in *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982]).

<sup>11</sup>*Shelley and the Chaos of History*, pp. 249-251

dueling tendencies of skepticism and idealism without having to be bogged down by the dialectical dispute between traditional historicist accounts of Shelley's figure and output and the decentering, poststructuralist inquiries epitomized by de Man's rhetoric of disfiguration.

This is where Roberts' and Goslee's critiques coalesce in their respective encounters with de Man's essay: rather than incapacitating discourse on Shelley's *Triumph of Life* by sabotaging the materials of historical recovery with the scar of disfiguration, the hypothetical aimlessness of critical prosopopoeia,<sup>12</sup> and the unerasable cognition of erasure, Roberts seeks to partially technologize the text world of *Triumph of Life* (in which the positing of a technology serves as a proleptic form of archaeological discourse) by renovating Lucretian thought via chaos science, and retroactively apply these neo-antique modules of hermeneutical critique to the disfigured corpus (the edited text itself, plus the manuscripts, the marginalia, the visual cues and doodles) of Shelley's final epic poem. It is in such a way that by marking and mapping out the chaotic unstructured traces left behind by Shelley's work that we arrive at what Goslee calls "technologies...of the visible [and] of the visionary,"<sup>13</sup> technologies of reading that present themselves as capable of overlapping the gulf of fractured authorial intentionality and gestating (in place of a monument/disfiguration) a veritable cognitive holdon a vast and broken edifice of loss and disorder.

Interestingly, though *The Triumph of Life* receives a lot of attention from Roberts, he hesitates in producing a fully Lucretian account for the text (though he gestures enough at the obvious Lucretian allusions and resonances that the poem contains). Roberts sticks closely to de Man's reading and places historical pressure (as de Man and most other critics are compelled to do) on the significance and figuration of Rousseau in the poem. Roberts traces Rousseau's figurality and the problem of disfiguration to the pivotal importance which *Julie: Ou, la nouvelle Heloise* had on Shelley at the moment of composing *The Triumph of Life*, an interpretative move

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<sup>12</sup>One of de Man's major points is that in attempting to historicize the disfigured body of Shelley's final poem, a resultant "monumentalizing" process occurs in which "an endless prosopopoeia" commences and "the dead are made to have a face and a voice which tells the allegory of their demise and allows us to apostrophize them in our turn... What *would* be naive is to believe that this strategy, which is not *our* strategy as subjects, since we are its product rather than its agent, can be a source of value and has to be celebrated or denounced accordingly" ("Shelley Disfigured," *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 122).

<sup>13</sup>*Shelley's Visual Imagination*, p. 27

which de Man himself, a critical thinker informed by and obsessed with Rousseau, surprisingly never fully makes:

'Disfiguration' has a special significance in *Julie*. Saint-Preux's vision of the fallen, ironic world of Paris, that promiscuous, exogamous world where no voice can ever hope to speak directly to the whole, stands as a negative pole to the calm and order of the 'naive' world of Clarens, the self-sufficient, endogamous retreat of Julie and Wolmar. The worst threat Paris poses is to the integrity of Saint-Preux's identity. Paris is a 'chaos' (207), a 'torrent' (221), a 'flux et reflux' (210), where 'tout change à chaque instant' and therefore 'le spectacle exige une continuité d'attention qui interrompt la réflexion' (222); it threatens to 'défigurer' the 'divin modèle' of Julie that Saint-Preux carries within himself--the anchor of his being (233). In such a world there is no possibility of Christlike representativeness: 'Each thinks of his own interest, none of the common good; and...individual interests are always opposed to each other, it is a perpetual collision of plots and cabals, an ebb and flow of prejudices, of contrary opinions, where the most agitated, worked up by the others, almost never know what is going on' (210)... This world of ironic fragmentation and disfiguration is one model for the 'perpetual flow' and 'living storm...whose airs too soon deform' of the *Triumph*.<sup>14</sup>

Roberts proceeds to make the evident connection that the chaotic Parisian world of *Julie* and the "ironic fragmentation" of *Triumph* share with the atomistic universe depicted in *De rerum natura*: "The final, nightmarish visions in the *Triumph* of the 'phantoms' (line 482), the 'dim forms' (line 483), of "Mask after mask [falling] from the countenance / And form of all' (lines 535-36) to be 'soon distorted' (line 531) and ultimately to self-destruct, are usually, and correctly, identified with the Lucretian simulacra. But as visions of contemporary society, they are equally drawn from Rousseau: 'I find nothing but a delusory appearance of feeling and truth, which changes at each moment, and destroys itself; I see only larvae and phantoms that strike the eye for a moment, and disappear as soon as one wishes to grasp them. Until now I have seen many masks; when will I see the the faces of men?' (*Julie*, 212)."<sup>15</sup> De Man's disfiguration ("the erasure or effacement [which] is indeed the loss of a face, in French *figure*"<sup>16</sup>) is absorbed by Roberts' Lucretian apparatus and reshaped as a species of simulacra, namely the shedding of a skin or film from the surface of a material body, an alternate

<sup>14</sup>Roberts' paginal citations are from *Julie: Ou, la nouvelle Heloise* (Paris: GarnierFreres, 1960); the English translations of passages from that edition of *Julie* are his own (*Shelley and the Chaos of History*, pp. 208-209).

<sup>15</sup>*Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 209

<sup>16</sup>"Shelley Disfigured," *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 100

Lucretian disfiguration which posits an erosion of figure that simultaneously produces an image or likeness, like a death mask or plaster cast, of itself. Lucretius describes this highly material, disfiguring process in Book IV of *De rerum natura*:

I say therefore that likenesses or thin shapes  
Are sent out from the surface of things  
Which we must call as it were their films or bark  
Because the image bears the look and shape  
Of the body from which it came, as it floats in the air.  
And this the dullest brain can recognize:  
In the first place, since within the range of vision  
Many things throw off bodies, some rarefied  
As bonfires throw off smoke or fires heat,  
And others denser and more closely knit  
Like the thin coats cicadas often drop  
In summer... (iv., 40-60)<sup>17</sup>

Shelley recycles the fundamental ideation of the above passage toward the end of *Triumph*:

each one  
Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly  
These shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blown  
In autumn evening from a poplar tree.  
Each like himself and like each other were,  
At first; but some distorted seemed to be  
Obscure clouds, moulded by the casual air;  
And of this stuff the car's creative ray  
Wrought all the busy phantoms that were there  
As the sun shapes the clouds—thus, on the way  
Mask after mask fell from the countenance  
And form of all... (526-37)<sup>18</sup>

Lucretius' *simulacrum* (a term which is translated in both Ronald Melville and Martin Ferguson Smith's respective versions as *image*<sup>19</sup>) assumes the size and magnitude of the poetic image itself, the material residue or trace of a discarded body, or of a body on its temporal path

<sup>17</sup>Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe* (Oxford World's Classics, 1997), trans. Ronald Melville, p. 102

<sup>18</sup>Shelley, *Complete Poems* (New York: Modern Library, 1994), p. 559

<sup>19</sup>Melville's English translation of Lucretius (*On the Nature of the Universe* [Oxford World's Classics, 1997]) attempts to follow the metrical-verse pattern as closely as possible, while Smith's (*On the Nature of Things* [Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1969]) opts for a more lexically precise prose rendition.

toward extinction (decay as suitable material *for* poetry, but also *of* poetry). For Shelley a form of melancholy wraps itself around this fatal image-shedding, a gravity that recalls the earlier concern Shelley demonstrated for the “fading coal” of the “mind in creation”--the masks or films that fly off the surfaces of things provide fuel for the production of poetry, but these same discarded skins or images mark the inevitable entropic shedding, the winnowing down, of each material substance. Though Roberts does not follow through and play upon the notion of the Lucretian simulacrum in *The Triumph of Life*, he does particularize its etymological relation to similarity/self-image, and circuits its potential resonance back to Rousseau’s self-reflexivity, embodied by the cryptic encounter with the mirror-like “Shape all light”: “Rousseau’s encounter with the shape is the passage ‘back’ to identity from having ‘nulle notion distincte de monindividu’ [*Reveries*, 17]. We can see this in the question Rousseau puts to the shape: ‘Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why’ [*Triumph*, line 398]. These are the questions of ironic self-consciousness, and mark Rousseau’s ‘fall.’”<sup>20</sup> Roberts traces Rousseau’s inquisitive mode (a subject upon which de Man exerts most of his critique) back to Milton’s description of Eve awaking for the first time in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*: “That day I oft remember, when from sleep / I first awaked, and found myself reposed / Under a shade of flowers, much wondering where / And what I was, whence thither brought, and how” (iv., 449-52). Eve’s reflective series of interrogatives (“where,” “what,” “whence,” “how”) mirror almost exactly the questions Rousseau puts to the Shape-all-light in *Triumph*.

Besides establishing the ostensible allusion Shelley makes to Eve’s self-reflexive episode in *Paradise Lost*--in which both Eve and Rousseau look at their reflection in a pool/well of water (“Like Eve, Rousseau moves to the well, and gazing into it sees a ‘shape’”)--Roberts’ re-reading of de Man’s reading eventually interprets the “Shape all light” as the personified boundary of Rousseau’s confrontation with his own self-consciousness, and Rousseau’s disintegration upon drinking from the chalice the Shape offers to him (“And suddenly my brain became as sand” [line 405]) describes the disaster and impossibility of acquiring or “figuring” the shape of that knowledge--in similar fashion to how Eve “falls’ into self-consciousness from a too-great desire

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<sup>20</sup>*Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 212; Roberts quotes from Rousseau’s *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1979), trans. Peter France.



to 'know'." Interestingly, Roberts posits (and de Man suggests) that part of Shelley's reasoning for selecting Rousseau as the poem's protagonist, and for depicting him as a rather dejected "organic" figure arising, literally, from the soil and herbage of the poem, results from Shelley's partial horror at the overly vulgarized confessional mode exhibited by Rousseau in the *Confessions*, a book which Shelley deplored; for which reason, Shelley seems to outline Rousseau's disastrous confrontation with his reflection (the "Shape all light") as a masturbatory failure arising from an "autoerotic longing for his own reflection."<sup>21</sup> The depiction of this failure, and Shelley's extreme dislike for an autoeroticism that does not generate a progenitive (rather than a self-reflexive) eros, lies at the heart of Rousseau's disfiguration.

My interest in *The Triumph of Life* however, and especially in Roberts' Lucretian angle, has far less to do with the historical figuration/semiotic disfiguration of Rousseau and far more to do with the particular frenzies and chaotic speeds that "shape and unshape" the swarming simulacra of the poem. *The Triumph of Life* poses extensive interpretative problems not merely because of its complicated status as an irresolvably unfinished poem, but also because it is one of Shelley's most straightforwardly *difficult* poems to read, in whatever basic sense. The problem of the simulacra (figures that throw off shadow and light) which the poem dwells upon is essentially one of speed, in which various velocities swarm and collide on the dual levels of meter and image: "...and some did fling / Shadows of shadows, yet unlike themselves, / Behind them; some like eaglets on the wing / Were lost in the white day; others like elves / Danced in a thousand unimagined shapes / Upon the sunny streams and grassy shelves" (lines 487-92). Speed deforms form, and the threatening, yet alluring formlessness of the "Shape all light" is essentially the dilemma of attempting to frame a modeling device on a chaotic force personified by the inherent shapelessness of light. Though I do not fully agree with de Man that "the 'Shape all light' is referentially meaningless since light, the necessary condition for shape, is itself, like water, without shape, and acquires shape only when split in the illusion of a doubleness which is not that of self and other," the shape of light (if light can have shape) does refer directly to the "ideological" positioning (the "positing power") of the Sun, the shape-giving source of light, and to the Shape-all-light as the "double of the sun [which] can only be the eye

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p. 213

conceived as the mirror of light. ‘Shape’ and ‘mirror’ are inseparable in this scene, just as the sun is inseparable from the shapes it generates and which are, in fact, the eye, and just as the sun is inseparable from itself since it produces the illusion of the self as shape.”<sup>22</sup> This same point is made by Benjamin Colbert (who, like Goslee, looks to Shelley’s manuscripts and notebooks for solidification) in regard to the poet’s general praxis: “Shelley’s attempt to define, practise, and idealise ‘authentic’ observation takes a particularly self-reflexive form that might be emblematised by another figure of the eye, one that appears frequently among the doodles in Shelley’s notebooks. [...] The embedded eyes [hand-drawn on a manuscript page from *Julian and Maddalo*] suggest that perception is always self-reflection; as the traveler looks at a landscape, he or she is always looking at him or herself looking as well. [...] In these contexts, Shelley’s marginal ‘eye’ signifies a new kind of observing subject emerging from travel discourse.”<sup>23</sup>

Though this paper is not concerned with Shelley’s travel writing, it is concerned with the kind of “traveling” the eye makes along the page, through the poetic meters and images, and at varying and often dizzying speeds, when one reads Shelley’s poetry, and more specifically, when one reads *The Triumph of Life*. Returning to de Man’s essay, I’d like to take away two key assertions he makes, on which I plan to build my own argument, namely, for finding a new and effective means of reading *The Triumph of Life* and, potentially, for reading Shelley’s poetry as a whole. The first of de Man’s statements deals with “optical confusion” as an effect of what I am prepared to call “speed”: “Light covers light, trance covers slumber and creates conditions of optical confusion that resemble nothing as much as the experience of trying to read *The Triumph of Life*, as its meaning glimmers, hovers, and wavers, but refuses to yield the clarity it keeps announcing.”<sup>24</sup> For de Man, speed is never a question (despite the fact that the poem alludes to speed and the optical confusions it creates quite frequently), but the traces of speed are unmistakable in the glimmering, hovering, and wavering the images (or simulacra) perform

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<sup>22</sup>“Shelley Disfigured,” *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 109

<sup>23</sup>Colbert, *Shelley’s Eye: Travel Writings and Aesthetic Vision* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), p. 8

<sup>24</sup>“Shelley Disfigured,” *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 106

in the poem.<sup>25</sup> The simulacra (which I am now extending to include not only Shelley's imagery but the metrical devices that register a speed-impaired or speed-motivated cognition) move so fast that they become dim in some cases, in others too bright; light, in this regard, ties very neatly into speed (the speed of light, after all, as the basis for mere appearance), and it is this interplay of the registers of speed and light that Shelley quite consciously utilizes to enjoin the reader to practice alternate methods of reading, methods which are motivated in turn to mirror the *clinamen*-like swerve of the images and metrical lines. It is in this regard that Roberts' sustained discussion of Lucretius (and just as significantly, Michel Serres' renovation of Lucretianism) comes into the fray: because *The Triumph of Life* is modeled on Lucretian simulacra (the entire catalogue of images and compositional/combinatorial philosophies that *De rerum naturanarrativizes* and embodies) it also follows Lucretius' poetics by exemplifying the simulacra, the science of the atoms and the void, within the very mechanics, the lines and measures, of the poem. This is why "the experience of trying to read *The Triumph of Life*" is so gnarly and optically confusing: it requires a specific "technology of reading" for making its highly mobile, clinamenistic images come to life, or, rather, makes it possible to *holograph* their textured message (i.e. to render the "whole message," to restore the "full image").

De Man's second statement deals more firmly with optics, but also, implicitly, with the optics that are informed and deformed by metrical speed: "The self that comes into being in the moment of reflection is, in spatial terms, optical symmetry as the ground of structure, optical repetition as the structural principle that engenders entities as shapes." De Man specifically relates "optical symmetry as the ground of structure" to the problematic confrontation Rousseau has with the Shape-all-light, but I am more interested in tying the deceptive depth-of-field<sup>26</sup> of a mirror-like optical symmetry to the technological possibility of a proto-photographic imagination, for two reasons: one, the moment Rousseau attempts to make contact with the Shape-all-light (a figuration that I am now positing as the imaging power

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<sup>25</sup>For example, among many others, lines 451-55, in which elements of light and speed glimmer, hover, waver, and mix: "Others stood gazing, till within the shade / Of the great mountain its light left them dim; / Others outsped it; and others made / Circles around it, like the clouds that swim / Round the high moon in a bright sea of air"

<sup>26</sup>I am borrowing the specific use that Lindsay Smith makes of the photographic "depth-of-field" in relation to Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry. See especially *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris, and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

of all images, the simulating power of all simulacra, or, in modern parlance, the photographic powers of the sun, source of all images, which produces, after all, “sun pictures”<sup>27</sup>) is the moment his “brain [becomes] as sand,” a poetic dissolve that imagistically alludes to Lucretian atomism (the brain, as matter, is broken up into “atomies” or grains of sand, by an accelerated temporal erosion, hence the psychotropism of the “cup” Rousseau drinks from), but also to the focal disruption which a hyper-closeup causes when “zooming” in too closely to an image that loses its “shape” and suddenly becomes monstrous, strange, unrecognizable (a beach or seashore seen up-close loses its nominal nature and breaks up into sand grains, in the same way that a hyper-zoom into Rousseau’s visagefragments into the “grain,” or graininess, of what would be an unrecognizably blown-up photographic image). Secondly, an “optical symmetry” that simulates a false depth-of-field (the “ground of structure”) also conditions, and is conditioned by, “optical repetition”--that is, the recovery or replacement of one image for/by another, via a kind of photographic repetition of the same. Again, the Lucretian simulacrum is still at work in this observation (the “skins,” or in Shelley’s terminology, the “shadows” that are repeatedly flung off the light-shaped surfaces of things as they move, their “afterimages”), but one may also perceive a similar form of “optical repetition” in the rhythmical meters and speeds that produce, destroy, and re-produce these images/simulacra within the same closed field or frame of reference. Rousseau’s moment of dissolution captures this process quite perfectly:

And suddenly my brain became as sand  
 Where the first wave had more than half erased  
 The track of deer on desert Labrador;  
 Whilst the wolf, from which they fled amazed,  
 Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore,  
 Until the second bursts;—so on my sight  
 Burst a new vision, never seen before                    (lines 405-411)

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<sup>27</sup>I am very directly, and obviously, playing upon the etymology of “photograph”--an image produced through a chemical sensitivity to sunlight, and whose depth-of-field is manipulated by a dimming or brightening, blocking or opening, of the passage of light--a technical process that is quite believably presaged by Shelley in the poem. The term “photograph” itself would have been appreciated by Shelley had he lived longer than he had: it was in 1839 that Sir John Herschel first made it popular in an address given to the Royal Society of London; Shelley would have been 47 years old then.

Rousseau's brain, at the moment of its atomic disintegration, becomes an open frame in which other images are metaphorically pictured, erased, and re-placed, with alarming speed--in a sense, Rousseau's atomised, sand-grainy brain represents the perceptual machine Shelley had alluded to before in the *Defence*, in which the "mind in creation" comes to require more heat-fuel to generate other images, other velocities of percept; equally so, Rousseau's brain plays upon the concept of the kinematic "frame" in which metamorphic images (deer, wolves, etc.) chase and flee from each other in highly motile ways. The "new vision" alluded to in the last line is that of the Shape-all-light disappearing in the "severe excess" of the re-appearing "cold bright car" of the sun. Shelley crucially designates the new vision not positively, nor directly, as that of the sun/chariot of life re-emerging and outshining every other source or shape of light (though indeed it is, technically speaking, that vision), but rather ties it indirectly, negatively, to the reduction and diminishment of the Shape-all-light from Rousseau's ken before the actual chariot of life is seen and described; lines 412-434 are about the reduction of focalized light, and consequently, the diminishment of the Shape-all-light, as a staged precondition for the re-appearance of the chariot of life and its overpowering "ideological" light. This staged reduction is described as a waning of light similar to the dropping "veil by veil [of] the silent splendour... / From Lucifer" during his fall from grace (lines 413-14).

The allusion to "veil by veil" is significant. Again, it repeats the Lucretian shedding of skin that the swerve of atoms causes in the gradual erosion of material solidity (the "skins" are sometimes described, or translated, as "veils"<sup>28</sup>), but it also recalls a different connotation for "veil," in an earlier statement from Shelley, in the *Defence*, that "Poetry lifts the veil from the

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<sup>28</sup>"Serres--who calls the *simulacra* 'voiles invisibles'--reads them as a way of conceptualizing the infinitesimal limits to the precision with which we can define any physical object. They are not so much real as virtual objects that symbolize a mathematical truth that is revealed to us by the transformations of the appearance of an object relative to the vantage points from which it is viewed, a truth that springs from the early attempt at an infinitesimal calculus, which Serres argues forms the mathematical underpinning of Lucretian physics. If we recall the definition of an atom as the arbitrary but always significant limit to our ability to define the difference between a curve and a tangent to that curve, then Serres's reasoning here is easy to follow: 'The flying envelopes are fluctuating borders, the surface as it approaches its limit. *Summo de corpore*. The *simulacra* detach themselves from things as in an infinitesimal calculation. As many can be removed as one wishes. Each object becomes a source of an infinite number of envelopes. Sight is as rigorous as the mathematical method. Now, as all objects are produced from and within a vortex [eddy], or in a spiral, it is turbulence itself that becomes the emitter of its own envelopes' [Roberts' translation]" (*Shelley and the Chaos of History*, pp. 315-316)

hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it coexists.”<sup>29</sup> Seen in this light, the unveiling of the Shape-all-light, i.e. the reduction of her light as she is overwhelmed by the “new vision” of the chariot of life, comes to signal a loss or “disfiguration” caused by the re-emergence (re-production, since the chariot of life is now seen for a second time in Rousseau’s account) of the “cold bright car” --hence, poetry lifts the veil off things, erases their outline, unshapes them a little, only to “impersonate” them, make copies or photographs of them, “clothed in...Elysian light” --pictures made expressly by light, but unshaped by light as well. Shelley comes back to this same point in a later statement in the *Defence*: “[Poetry] arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life and, veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind... Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.”<sup>30</sup>

What does this imperative to “[arrest] the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life” signal? A mourning for the decay of things, but also, strangely, paradoxically, a *re-veiling* of this same process of decay using the very skins/images which mark the effects of decay; it is after all with these discarded remnants of an image (the ruins of a castle wall, the limbless torso of a Hellenic goddess) that the poet is able to re-piece or frame an event, a picture, a statue. If in Lucretian physics, decay produces material skins that “sometimes become distorted in transit” and even cause “thought and dreams about things that never even existed,”<sup>31</sup> then Shelley’s theorization of the veiling/unveiling properties of poetry exhibits two registers of cognizance that I wish to arrive at: speed and light. It is speed (temporal speed, metrical speed, atomic speed) which unshapes the shapeliness of things-in-transit, and which connotes the physical force with which a poem like *The Triumph of Life* exhibits the drive toward entropy, but also the negentropic drive away from dissolution; a

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<sup>29</sup> “A Defence of Poetry,” *Shelley’s Prose*, p. 282

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 294-95

<sup>31</sup> See Paul Turner, “Shelley and Lucretius” (*Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 10, no. 39 [Aug. 1959]), pp. 281-282

discursive veiling, or “optical confusion,” caused by speed, but also an unveiling, a stripping away of the layers of a thing, by the phenomenal forces of speed. It is, however, in an opposite, though unopposed, sense that poetry in and through light “arrests” a thing, by holographically capturing it, or veiling it in such a way that it can be pictured, lenslessly photographed, phenomenally or aurally captured; but also, conversely, the register of light is how poetry “sends...forth among mankind” swerving images of flight and decay, by re-animating them and un-veiling their metaphoric, transpositional motility.

*The Triumph of Life* is, consequently, a poem defined, both historically and formalistically, by entropy; and its meters and measures, its speeds of alteration, situate and preserve mechanisms of negentropy that “proliferate meaning” for the poem. The poem is entropic because it outruns itself and falls into an ocean of contorted wave-tossed meaning -- we cannot help but recall that Shelley’s death was literally *oceanic*, and this death, defined by a sudden spill into the plurality and conflict of interpretations, makes a “monument” of meaning out of the posited, threatening meaninglessness of the poem’s unfinished state. But the *Triumph* is negentropic because it spreads itself wide among the prosthetics of other texts and methodologies of reading; its unfinishedness practically *insists* upon widening the arsenal of reading practices and critical techniques in the effort to overcome its wall of silence, its Epicurean recession into *ataraxia*. Political and literary historicism, philological discourse, deconstructionist decryption, and poststructural critique are only a few of the approaches I’ve briefly cited here. Since I am not after an exhaustive reinterpretation of *Triumph*, nor indeed am I interested in revising the current criticism on *Triumph* in order to suit a more holistic account for the poem, my aims will appear quite different. I propose for a new “technology of reading” (or a “technology of visibility,” as Goslee calls it) that renders the cognitive difficulties of the poem (and Shelley’s poetics alongside it) more soluble and relevant to the highly graphic climate which the “pictorial turn” has installed in our information-heavy atmosphere of image-production; a dynamic technology of reading that manages to restore the historical traces of the poem to the non-anachronisms of Lucretian physics, which Michel Serres (and Hugh Roberts after him) have done much to update and validate under the theoretical lens of modern science and the complex networking of contemporary political structures.

Since it is my belief that Shelley as poet-scientist and theoretician would likely have been a “technologist,” both for the discipline’s extensionality and relations with historicism and revolution-building, as well as for its deep embeddedness in physics and scientific practice (“[poetry] is at once the center and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science and that to which all science must be referred”<sup>32</sup>), then I propose for repurposing two separate technologies of measurement--*dromoscopy* and *holography*--one theoretical, the other actual, for the express use of analogically tracking and classifying two of Shelley’s most recurrent topoi, *speed* and *light*, within the open/closed “thermodynamic” system of *The Triumph of Life*. Dromoscopy, a term coined by Paul Virilio--and which can be etymologically piecemealed as a “study of speed” or a “running target” (GK. *dromos*, moving, running; *skopos*, target, aim)--is theorized as “*the wait for the coming of what abides*: the trees that file past on the screen of the windshield, the images that rise up on the television...all substitutes for reality, these apparent movements are only simulacra.” The easy transition to Lucretian simulacra is as fortuitous as it is tenable: “But here it is a question of returning to the notion of visibility and therefore to light, *since the visible is the effect of the apparent movement of the sun rising and setting on the horizon*, it is the dromoscopic illusion of its course that organizes our vision of the ambient world...”<sup>33</sup> There is perhaps no better (because accidental) summary of the phenomenological text-space that Shelley’s *Triumph of Life* constructs (and destroys, and reconstructs) with each rising and setting of the sun, the chariot of life--and for reasons of resonance, Virilio’s dromoscopy prepares us for a speedy technologizing of “our vision of the ambient world of *Triumph*.”

Holography, on the other hand, provides an analogic handle for the problem of light and its relation to what appears in the *Triumph* as a veritable mourning for the passing of things and the “optical confusions” they leave behind. The “transitory brightness” which Shelley had earlier described as the residual effect of an “invisible influence, like an inconstant wind” working on the “fading coal” of the “mind in creation,” can perhaps be posited as a proleptic desire for the hologram/holograph--a transitory brightness, a picture made of light,

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<sup>32</sup>“A Defence of Poetry,” *Shelley’s Prose*, p. 293

<sup>33</sup>Virilio, *Negative Horizon* (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 110-111



that *reinscribes in space* the lost or garbled message, or brightens again the faint light of a thought-image on the verge of expiration. Shelley, of course, would never have imagined that photography, much less holography, would be possible in his lifetime--but the desire to "arrest the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life" bespeaks a proto-photographic desire to capture the images of things before they flitter away. Yet why use so advanced and imperfectly understood a technology as holography and not a more relevant and widely-practiced interpretive tool as photography?

As I shall explain in the final section, *The Triumph of Life*, within its syntactic space and metrical/imagistic play of speeds, cultivates a type of "three dimensionality" that requires the reader to go beyond textual space into phenomenological cognition, and pushes her to read both up and down, right to left, as a way of keeping track of the clash of velocities and the swerve of atomistic images. While photography rhymes well with de Man's point about the deceptive depth-of-field which some sections of the poem put into practice, the two-dimensionality of the photographic imagination does not fully appreciate the real *depth* of Shelley's desire for "arresting" images; not only does Shelley generate Lucretian simulacra that optically repeat themselves and clash with others, but he also spaces them out across entire verse sections as spatial vectors that propel the reader to read backward and across or over lines, and eventually connect these vectors so as to produce something like a "three dimensional" image. It is, thus, with this experimental repurposing in mind that the "*Triumph of Life* is a criticism, not of life, but of a certain way of looking at life,"<sup>34</sup> and surely, of a certain way of *reading* and *looking* at poems as well.

## II. Shelley and the Problem of Speed

The question of speed in poetry appears to be a largely imaginary one. There is no entry in the latest edition of the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (1993) for the category of metrical speed nor for that of states of velocity in metrical performance. This is because the sense of speed in a poem remains exactly that, a *sense* which is largely imaginary and highly relative to one's affective reading/performance of any given poem. If we are to believe the

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<sup>34</sup>Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 399

linguists and theorists who work in the field of cognitive poetics, the sense of speed in poetry is largely a result of cognitive processes that work hard to differentiate the value and objecthood of sense-impressions (in metrical terms, those features of a poem which assemble its overall “tone”<sup>35</sup>) that swarm and emerge from the undifferentiated background that brings them, *immediately*, into perception. It is the very immediacy of the experience of a fresh reading of a poem which brings to mind the case for speed; speed as a presence, a cerebral quality, a *formal* notion, would seem to be evoked by the instantiation (the performance) of the poem in cases where a celerity in the retention of its formal qualities (and consequently a blurring of its cognitive particulars) simulated a reciprocal celerity in the poem’s resonance and resultant afterimage. Poems will seem especially speedy when their rhythmical tone assumes a cerebral swiftness, a metrical lightness, unmolested by a coeval lexical and syntactic density.

There are few poets as speedy---if one is permitted that descriptor---as Shelley. Shelley’s “speed” has posited a minor but nonetheless vital problematic for Shelleyan studies. William Keach, in his classic chapter on “Shelley’s Speed,” summarizes the two traditional views of this problem neatly. The positive valuation of Shelley’s speediness is exemplified by C. S. Lewis, who describes “the air and fire of Shelley” as “the very antithesis of the Miltonic solidity, the untrammelled, reckless speed through pellucid spaces which make us imagine while we are reading him that we have somehow left our bodies behind.” The negative formulation of this same attitude is personified by F.R. Leavis, who denigrates “Shelley’s eager, breathless hurry” as a prosodic desire which “always seems to lean forward, so that it must run in order not to fall.”<sup>36</sup> Dante’s concept of the *cadenza*, the verse which falls in a graceful silence owing to the harmonic linkage of sonority with sense, is revealed in Shelley to be a confused verse which falls over because it is always in a hurry.

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<sup>35</sup>My older edition of the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (1974) establishes “tone” as a principally affective construction into which sense-impressions (such as that of “speed” or “speediness”) readily fit and are molded to inform the whole: “Traditionally, [‘tone’] has denoted an intangible quality, frequently an affective one, which is metaphorically predicated of a literary work or of some part of it such as its style. It is said to pervade and ‘color’ the whole, like a mood in a human being, and in various ways to contribute to the aesthetic excellence of the work. Some of the other terms naming the same concept are ‘Gestalt-quality,’ ‘impression,’ ‘spirit,’ ‘atmosphere,’ ‘aura,’ and ‘accent.’”

<sup>36</sup>*Shelley’s Style*, pp. 154-155

Several attempts have been made to rectify the biases of Leavis' severity and Lewis' ardor, notably Ants Oras' argument for a kinetic reading of Shelley and Richard Harter Fogle's attempt to apply the terms "kinesthetic" (as opposed to kinetic) and "motor" to a variety of Shelleyan images. But Keach maintains that despite these critical efforts, "this blurring together of semantic and affective notions of imagery, along with the failure to clarify the distinction between 'kinesthetic' and 'motor' imagery, makes it difficult to use Fogle's [or Oras'] account as a basis for further explorations into this aspect of Shelley's writing... If we confine ourselves to the disposition of ideas and images, thinking affectively about Shelley's speed may be unnecessary and even confusing: there is no reason to assume that a reference to speed in the language or an abrupt transition from one thought to another will necessarily produce a sensation of speed in the reader."<sup>37</sup> Keach shows himself to be solidly against affective readings, but he also stresses the impotence of relying on a strictly performative hermeneutic: "words on the page do not in fact move, no matter what their phonetic and syntactical organization." Against such models of interpretation, Keach offers a different critical apparatus: "Shelley's speed might best be thought of, then, as the formal verbalized articulation, produced by careful observation and deliberate compositional adjustment, of a mind working rapidly and fluctuantly in a world constituted in part through that mind's own perceptual activity."<sup>38</sup>

Keach's formulation of the poem being "constituted in part through [the poet/reader's] mind's own perceptual activity" has a solid basis in the theory of the "embodied mind" and cognitive poetics, such as it has been defined and developed by (among numerous other cognitive poetics) George Lakoff, Mark Turner, Reuven Tsur, Peter Stockwell, Joanna Gavins, Gerard Steen, Jeroen Vandaele, Geert Brone, and many others.<sup>39</sup> Cognitive poetics "attempts to find out how poetic language and form, or the critic's decisions, are constrained and shaped by human information processing," by utilizing an interdisciplinary approach informed by the cognitive sciences.<sup>40</sup> But cognitive poetics does not trivialize the reading of a poem, nor its

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp. 155-156

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 159

<sup>39</sup> Lakoff's *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987) is a classic introduction to cognitive linguistics; Peter Stockwell's *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (2002) and Vandaele & Brone's *Cognitive Poetics: Goals, Gains, and Gaps* (2009) have similarly designed structures that provide a general overview of advances in the field; Reuven Tsur's *Toward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics* (2008) is the most expansive and poetry-oriented of all.

<sup>40</sup> See Tsur, "The Nature of Cognitive Poetics," pp. 1-28 in *Toward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics*

concomitant activities of literary and historical criticism, by merely applying “some of the insights from cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics” to a generalized reading that treats “literature as just another piece of data”; rather, cognitive poetics stages an encounter with the poem which subsumes the trifecta of “author-text-reader” synchronicity into a theory of the embodied mind that accounts for psychological and physiological responses to the total “eventization” of a poem; the poem not necessarily, nor strictly, as a text waiting to be read from the varying perspective of different historicities and acculturations, but the poem as a “natural object” or phenomenal event that bases itself exclusively in the act of reading<sup>41</sup> (or, to use Bernard Stiegler’s terminology, in the act of the poem becoming a “temporal object” bounded and defined by the condition of its being read at all<sup>42</sup>). A genuine encounter with a poem, necessarily a critical encounter no matter how trained the reader may be, presupposes the activation of complex mental processes that engage with the poetic text in much the way that a mobile body engages with topography and spatiality; each syntactic unit creates problems of mental traction, even as it invents metrical springs of oral performativity that thrust the reader forward, line by line, foot by foot, until arriving at a pool of coherence, or a wall of incoherence. Any successful poem demands repeat readings because of its irresolvable nature as a terrain that resists easy trekking or as a gnarly *topos* that complicates the standardized cultivation of mental agriculture.

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<sup>41</sup> Stockwell utilizes the term “natural object” to distinguish a genuine reading of the text from the text in itself: “The object of investigation of [cognitive poetics] is not the artifice of the literary text alone, or the reader alone, but the more natural process of reading when one is engaged with the other. This is a different thing altogether from the simple and primary activity of reading. Literary texts are artefacts, but ‘readings’ are natural objects” (*Cognitive Poetics*, pp. 1-2).

<sup>42</sup> “An object is ‘temporal’ when its flow coincides with the stream of consciousness of which it is the object (example: a melody).” Stiegler’s definition quite usefully updates the antiquated notion of the poem as a stationary aesthetic object, and all its connotations of monumentalized static molding, and provides us with a lexicon that both serves the cognitive level of reading-receptivity and the poetic level of historical context and authorial signifiacance. A poem is a temporal object precisely because its meaning is in its use, which is fundamentally temporal in both its poetic (it must be *metrically* prepared and assembled) and readerly (it must be read and digested, *in time*) valences. The “melody” is an object that unwinds in, and is composed of, time, and so too is the poem, whose object is the cognitive ability (“stream of consciousness”) of the reader-critic. (See “Introduction” to Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, vol. 3: *Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*.)

Shelley's vistas of desire and landscapes of speed afford a fitting opportunity for utilizing the cognitive approach, primarily since Keach points out that a fundamental part of Shelley's poetics relies on the Humean idea that "the mind cannot create, it can only perceive":

Mind is the recipient of impressions made on the organs of sense, and without the action of external objects we should not only be deprived of all knowledge of the existence of mind but totally incapable of the knowledge of anything. It is evident, therefore, that *mind deserves to be considered as the effect rather than the cause of motion*. The ideas which suggest themselves, too, are prompted by the circumstances of our situation; these are the elements of thought, and from the various combinations of these our feelings, our opinions, and volitions inevitably result.<sup>43</sup> (Italics mine)

The materialist notion that mind is nothing without the sensory input of kinetic phenomena can be readjusted in cognitive poetics (not excluding several strains of phenomenology) as the observation that perceptual cognition almost always derives from spatial orientation.<sup>44</sup> As Shelley has argued elsewhere, mind is enriched and produced in and through motion;<sup>45</sup> similarly, the sense of speed in Shelley's poetry is not created by the reader's affective performance of the poem, as Keach makes clear, but is rather "perceived" through a critical engagement with the poem's complex system of differential velocities and the spaces they traverse. It is important to note here that motion, and speed as such, constitutes the manifestation of a supremely *responsive* text-world that inspires and motivates a worldly (i.e. materialist) engagement with its spatio-temporal phenomena; one cannot know a land terrain well enough without possibly crossing over its crags and surfaces, and the same applies to a poem, which quickens the mind to an action/activity that responds and gives shape to the terrain of the text (leaving footprints, cognitive trails, residues of meaning).

If, according to Keach, Shelley's poetry, and particularly the sense of speed it creates, works to demonstrate "why the mental state of expressive desire is a precondition of linguistic

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<sup>43</sup> Shelley, "A Refutation of Deism," *Shelley's Prose*, p. 136. This assertion is made again by Shelley in the *Essay on Life*, and basically encapsulates a part of Hume's argument in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

<sup>44</sup> See Tsur, "Space Perception and the Poetry of Orientation," *Toward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics*, pp. 385-403

<sup>45</sup> Shelly writes, "Matter, such as we behold it, is not inert. It is infinitely active and subtle. Light, electricity, and magnetism are fluids not surpassed by thought itself in tenuity and activity; like thought they are sometimes the cause and sometimes the effect of motion" ("A Refutation of Deism," *Shelley's Prose*, p. 133).

development,” then a new analytical model should be proposed to engage with Shelley’s speed on a different, possibly phenomenological, level that goes beyond the merely affective. Such an apparatus would have to take shape as a veritable *dromoscopy*, a “phenomenology of speed” that takes into account the cognitive aspects of Shelley’s optics of speed. Borrowing the term from Paul Virilio, a dromoscopic study of Shelley can perchance offer an alternative *discursus* (L. *discurrere*, “to run here and there”<sup>46</sup>) for tracking speed even when it appears falsely (and dangerously) static, or heads into the oceanic entropy of the “end of the poem.” Or, conversely, when the speed of a poem (in its metres, or in its images) manages to erode the semantic character of the poetic form without resolving the conditions of its sonorous implosion. A dromoscopic study would also make great use of Keach’s stipulation that Shelley’s speed does not involve a constancy of effect (otherwise the sense of speed would be imperceptible and we would be lulled into an illusory repose) but rather institutes an “alternation of rapid movement and arrested movement [which] may be more important than speed *per se*.”<sup>47</sup> Such a discovery, of not one speed but many speeds and forms of inertia, would situate itself within a field of holographic potential. As I shall argue in the next part, dromoscopy is only one part of the equation to Shelley’s optics of speed: the figure of optical holography offers a resonant, metamorphic analogon to understanding how Shelley’s alternation between speed and inertia (or, in physical terms, movement and matter) simulates a “light field” of static objects/images which are formed and deformed, produced and erased, by the different flows of photon energy that reveal or disguise, brighten or darken, the image-objects in a unified (reified) image. It is in this way that dromoscopy and holography can be usefully applied toward explaining how “some of the most remarkable kinetic sequences in Shelley’s subsequent poetry turn upon his ability to transform impressions of speed into antithetical moments of suspension or stasis.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>“From the Latin *discurrere*, to run here and there, a term that very well conveys the impression of haste and disturbance or normal mental operations in the picnoleptic [epileptic person]” (Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, pp. 113-114).

<sup>47</sup>*Shelley’s Style*, p. 169

<sup>48</sup>*Shelley’s Style*, p. 171

### III. Speeding Toward the End of the Poem: the Oceanic and the Fold

How does speed generate poetic style, and can speed, or “speediness,” be governed to be a style in poetry at all? In a perception-oriented theory of poetry, the sense of speed is one usually formulated through the sublimation of (textual) space into gestalt experience. Rather than inviting pause on specific rhythmic units, the overall rhythmic structure of a “speedy” poem can carry the reader, much like how a river will carry a body inexorably to the sea, toward a concealed reservoir of meaning-coherence, or what might be called “oceanic undifferentiation.” The term “oceanic” comes from Romain Rolland’s description of religious emotion in a letter written to Freud (which the latter would use famously as the opening aporia for *Civilization and its Discontents*<sup>49</sup>). “Oceanic feeling” is the exalted but momentary sense that one is connected to a larger cosmic order transcending the perceptual boundaries of the *principium individuationis*.<sup>50</sup> In more ways than one, the oceanic is but another fold in the rhetoric of the Romantic “Sublime”. In Lucretian terminology, the oceanic is set apart as the *suave marimagno* moment of non-transcendent reflection, which opens Book IV of *De rerum natura*: “A joy it is, when the strong winds of storm / Stir up the waters of a mighty sea, / To watch from shore the troubles of another”<sup>51</sup>--the oceanic as a form of *ataraxia*, a visionary mode that sees in tempests the exalted, yet impermanent truth of things. Anton Ehrenzweig uses the term “oceanic” to describe the “poemagogic” application of gestalt theory on the processes of art perception: aesthetic differentiation involves both self-identity (I-ness as the principle of perception in subject-object relations) and the division of space and time, ground and figure, into compartmentalized sections. Oceanic undifferentiation, or in a less intense

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<sup>49</sup>The critique of the “oceanic feeling” as a proxy for the illusion of religious sentiments would also shape the basis for Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion*. (See *The Freud Reader*, pp. 685-772)

<sup>50</sup>The concept gained major traction from Nietzsche’s concepts of the Dionysian and the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Apollo...appears to us as the apotheosis of the *principium individuationis*... This apotheosis of individuation, if it be at all conceived as imperative and laying down precepts, knows but one law---the individual, i.e., the observance of the boundaries of the individual, *measure* in the Hellenic sense.” The Dionysian, on the other hand, is the dissolution or mixture of the *principium individuationis* into the background of ecstatic choral mass. “Tragedy” is thus based on the dialectic of the ordering figure of melodic discursivity weaving in and out of the disordered, or scattered, ground of choral music. The tragic is shaped by the perception of the whole from its (tragically fragmented) part. (See *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, pp. 33-144)

<sup>51</sup>Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. Ronald Melville, p. 36

model, aesthetic dedifferentiation, involves a contrary impulse to erase the perceptual lines and boundaries that divide figure from ground, or the perceived object from the perceiving subject, producing an emotion of exhilarated unity with a fluid, destabilized, “oceanic” perceptual field: the I-ness of the signifying self finds itself dissolved into the rolling, shifting fabric of the signified.<sup>52</sup>

Susan Stewart provides an alternate version of the *principium individuationis* (Apollonian coherence) and oceanic undifferentiation (Dionysian incoherence) binary in the more straightforward terminology of “sense” and “nonsense”: “Nonsense...points to the essentially undifferentiated nature of information prior to information. Until systems of typification and relevance are brought to the text, it exists only in its physical state.”<sup>53</sup> These “systems of typification and relevance” are socially constituted and come to be labeled “common sense,” that is, a sense of idiomatic coherence activated by the notion of everyday use and habituation. Nonsense, active within the private or elite-ordinated languages of poets, does not, however, lie apart from common sense, in the same way that the *principium individuationis* cannot stand apart for too long from the threat of oceanic dispersal or undifferentiation--because “nonsense always refers back to a sense that itself cannot be assumed.” Similarly, the *principium individuationis* of the poem (its formal boundedness or self-reflexivity) is delineated in relief to the oceanic, to the meta-tradition of the traditional, to the socially monumentalized and culturally distributable; there is always a canon against which the poem struggles or which helps it to define itself as inclusively apart. The oceanic isn’t foreign to Stewart’s taxonomy of the “five operations of nonsense”: “...the boundary of the text can be made ambiguous by a deficiency of signification, by gaps or tears in the performance, or by a refusal to close the frame around the text. Such a splitting is implicit in the idea of metacommunication--the capacity of the text to ‘break frame,’ to leak from one universe of discourse to another.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Ehrenzweig classes oceanic undifferentiation and aesthetic dedifferentiation in the same area of psychoanalytic process---as types of cognition or mental mapping opposed to the censor function of consciousness---but he makes a further distinction between them: “I will speak of *undifferentiation* when referring to the static structure of unconscious image making, of *dedifferentiation* when describing the dynamic process by which the ego scatters and represses surface imagery.” (*The Hidden Order of Art*, p. 19)

<sup>53</sup>*Nonsense*, p. 96

<sup>54</sup>*Nonsense*, p. 103



Leakage suggests the prospect of fluidity, of a gap or hole in the vehicular or disciplinary wholeness of a poem, a leak in meaning that ties a poem like *The Triumph of Life* directly to the oceanic; in other words, to the possibility of an infinite play of interpretations:

The manipulation of boundaries, performed in time as well as in space, may also involve a play with the possibility of infinity. Just as play with the boundaries of discourse events involves a transformation of members' expectations regarding the horizon of the situation, so play with infinity involves a transformation of another aspect of members' expectations---their sense of events as characterized by distinguishable beginnings and endings. Reality-generating conversations are endowed by members with historical boundaries. These boundaries depend upon a shared sense of what counts and does not count---a sense of discrete events that can be arranged in a temporal order, one after the other. And this implies both a causal order, events causing other events, and a hierarchical order, events contingent upon the import of other events. The discreteness of events depends upon a temporal as well as a spatial sense of closure, and each sense implicates, is *relative to*, the other.<sup>55</sup>

If we apply Stewart's discussion of the nonsense of the infinite to our concern with poetic form, then the "boundaries [that] depend upon a shared sense of what counts and does not count" can quite literally be taken to mean the metrical boundaries of accentual-syllabic verse (the rhythmic feet, the count of syllables) as well as the semiotic boundaries of the "sense" which the verse is striving to erect (the narrative of the poem, the "discrete events that can be arranged in a temporal order"). Now what might the "manipulation of boundaries," oceanic feeling, and the cognitive processes of differentiation/undifferentiation have to do with poetic speed? Oceanic feeling bases itself on the sense of the infinite, on vast spaces stretching out toward inexhaustible horizons, and I propose that poetic speed presents itself as a desire to traverse these vast spaces, to reach the horizon from which space extends like an infinitely (un)rolling pattern.<sup>56</sup> Acceleration defines the engine that drives all desiring-machines toward

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid, p. 116

<sup>56</sup>It would be useful to recall here Shelley's image (in *The Triumph of Life*) of the initial "vision" (what I am openly labeling a cognitive pattern, a carpet or a "measure") that rolls (as opposed to unrolls) over the speaker's mental terrain: "And then a vision on my brain was rolled" (line 40). This vision imposes itself (it is not unrolled by something else but rolls itself, as if overwhelming the speaker's volitional sense) through a compulsion that is signified internally by a dimly felt desire: "...and I *knew* / That I had *felt*..." (lines 33-34). Knowledge of the rolling of the carpet over the speaker's mind masks a desire to be held captive by it--because the captivity is reduced to a feeling, an affective state that does not block or intercept but receives and spectates (the speaker is seduced by "the birds, the fountains and the ocean [which] hold / Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air" (lines 38-39). Shelley's speaker here is precisely the "desiring-machine"

productivity, the filling-in of, or travel over, spatial terrains; the greater the desire to traverse these terrains, the greater the speed, and reciprocally, the longer and larger the terrain.<sup>57</sup> A gestalt is formed from the perceptual field built out of spatial cognition, and speed is always isometric to the size and intensity of the gestalt. (The question is asked, “How far and how fast must one travel to cover the whole?” One must first orient oneself in the space-dynamic of the “whole” before navigating a passage through it; a type of map-making has to occur.<sup>58</sup>) The preconditions for speed to manifest itself are thus made possible by the eruption and unfolding of space and topography; in literary studies it is the *topos* which designates the critical activity of localizing structures, their effects, and the means to negotiate their passageways. The oceanic is merely the archetype for the “end of the poem,” the destination toward which the various rhythmic components of a poem drive forward, shifting from speed to speed, and requiring a toggle function between the cognitive processes of aesthetic differentiation and dedifferentiation.

In one sense, poetical speed is a drive toward a meaning or plurality which typifies the drama of Newtonian physics, particularly the 2nd law of motion: the mass of the object (let us say, the syntactic or rhythmic whole of the poem, weighable by the stresses that govern its flow and readability) is accelerated, put into motion, by a net force greater than the mass. This net force represents what Giorgio Agamben calls the poem’s formal desire for an ending, which works against the resistance of the accumulated mass-weight of the syntactic units. This Newtonian imbalance of forces produces the chief tension of the poem’s enactment of velocity-differentials: the poem’s necessarily occult meaning (hypothetically a static, weighty, resolute

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theorized by Deleuze/Guattari, a machine attached to the machinery of the poem, acting as both a blockage which must be trespassed and a valve which allows itself to be trespassed, in a binary situation (See Deleuze/Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 1-50).

<sup>57</sup>Virilio: “...in the continuum of the trip, what is ahead governs the progress, the speed of propulsion produces its own horizon: the *greater* the speed, the more *distant* the horizon” (*Negative Horizon*, p. 106).

<sup>58</sup>“Orientation processes occur whenever one is located in some unfamiliar environment: an unfamiliar space, time, or atmosphere. When you enter a room with unknown people under unknown circumstances, frequently you resort to what may be called ‘fast orientation’: you collect information with all your senses or faculties, integrating it with an intuitive speed. You perceive the overall atmosphere rather than ascertain the stable objects, facts, and logic of the situation. Speed is achieved at the expense of precision” (Tsur, *On the Shore of Nothingness*, pp. 93-94).

meaning that recedes within the thingness of the poem) is inversely pulled back while the poem's performativity pushes forward the interplay of the poet's speed of composition and the reader's speed of comprehension. In Agamben's estimation, the poem's desire for an ending, and the surplus values of its performativity, are characterized by the tension created by the semantic and metrical (or "semiotic") drives that duel in the poem. A pure semanticism would furnish a pure prose in which meaning finds itself resolved with directness, whereas a pure metricality would furnish a pure poetry in which sound finds itself fulfilled at the expense of meaning or closure, becoming instead "music"; the mixture of the two genres complicates the self-identity or *principium individuationis* of the poem, and the presence of speed only furthers this complication by accelerating the process through which a differentiation of the two valences could be capably exercised. Agamben lists *enjambment* as the only possible marker of distinction that sets the genre of poetry apart from the genre of prose: poetry announces itself through the opposition of sound to sense (thus making necessary the prosodic instrument of enjambment), whereas prose presents itself as the absence of this opposition (since in prose, the success of meaning or *significancy* depends on the suppression of blank sonority):

Awareness of the importance of the opposition between metrical segmentation and semantic segmentation has led some scholars to state the thesis (which I share) according to which the possibility of enjambment constitutes the only criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose. For what is enjambment, if not the opposition of a metrical limit to a syntactical limit, of a prosodic pause to a semantic pause? 'Poetry' will then be the name given to the discourse in which this opposition is, at least virtually, possible; 'Prose' will be the name for the discourse in which this opposition cannot take place.<sup>59</sup>

Agamben theorizes on the "end of the poem" (literally, the last verse of a poem, or what I have already described above as oceanic dispersal) as the locality where a poem's identity is compromised by two motivations.<sup>60</sup> One motivation is semantic: the poem seeks a meaning, or

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<sup>59</sup> *The End of the Poem*, pp. 109-112

<sup>60</sup> "One of the first consequences of this position of the poem in an essential disjunction between sound and sense (marked by the possibility of enjambment) is the decisive importance of the end of the poem. The verse's syllables and accents can be counted; its synaloephae and caesuras can be noted; its anomalies and regularities can be catalogued. But the verse is, in every case, a unit that finds its *principium individuationis* only at the end, that defines itself only at the point at which it ends" (*The End of the Poem*, p. 111).

rather, a meaningfulness that acquires a vestige of the ratiocination which drove it to invention; the other impulse is semiotic: it is charged by invisible, exquisitely musical wavelengths, and it is driven by a hunger and urgency that demand a velocity of signs, of sounds especially, in no expressly ratiocinative order. The end of the poem, and usually the last verse line, is the site where the two currents collide and must come to a resolution: does the poem end here, satisfied that it has gathered up its sign-quarry; or does it continue onward, enjamb yet again, trek forward on its tired legs until an apocalyptic event interrupts its map-making course?

Taken thus, the site of the poem's ending, where enjambment can no longer occur, jeopardizes the poem's identity as "poem"; it could turn out to be something other than a poem, something opposite, or just the determined nihilism of prose. Agamben, citing Dante's authority, implies that what the poem of authentic power does to resolve the issue of identity is altogether different from what it is expected to do; the poem of authentic power neither ends nor does it continue along its same path of inquiry and invocation; rather, it terminates, as all rivers do, at the mouth of the ocean. It loses its singularity, its *principium individuationis*, and reaches into the Nietzschean "eternal life behind all phenomena, and despite all annihilation." Agamben quotes Dante from the Florentine's *De vulgarieloquentia*: "The endings of the last verses are most beautiful if they fall into silence together with the rhymes (*Pulcherrimetamen se habentultimorumcarminumdesinentiae, si cum rithmo in silentiumcadunt*)."<sup>61</sup> The end of the poem (as destiny and as location<sup>62</sup>) achieves its aims when it has at last "fallen" into the silence which the terminus of speech announces. Rhymes terminate in silence because the cognitive faculties are eclipsed by sonorities that subside in contemplation. A soundless music, a senseless sense, an oceanic dispersal of effects, each of which is enacted by the rapid thrust of the modules of poetic velocity.

It is in this regard that Shelley's *Triumph of Life* is particularly marked by a series of disfigurements that are caused by the struggle between the poem's formal *principium individuationis* (its complicated status as a "finished" or "complete" poem, a poem that fails to

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<sup>61</sup>Agamben continues: "What is this falling into silence of the poem? What is beauty that falls? And what is left of the poem after its ruin?" (*The End of the Poem*, pp. 113-114).

<sup>62</sup>Virilio: "Speed, by its violence, becomes a *destiny* at the same time as being a *destination*" (*Negative Horizon*, p. 40).

stand alone without a bibliographic code or technology of reading to support it) and its heavily historicized dispersal into oceanic undifferentiation, the problematic non-closure that marks the terminally interrupted end of the poem. The *terminus* of *Triumph of Life* is precisely the forceful termination of the next potential enjambment, the next possible metrical linkage; its destined locus is Shelley's tomb, the oceanic both literally and figuratively, his silence the silence referred to by Dante (and quoted by Agamben) as the beauty that occurs when sound and sense (or sense and nonsense) fall simultaneously into a choreographed quietude. We return to de Man's major conclusion: *The Triumph of Life* is fatally, historically, linguistically marked by Shelley's death, so that the scarred unfinishedness of the poem comes to represent its auraticfinishedness. The final line of the edited version of the poem ("Then, what is life? I cried.'-- ) ends, as de Man has made evident, in an unanswered/unanswerable question vocalized by "a questioning entity, standing within the pathos of its own indetermination...[who] appears in the text, in the figures of the narrator who interrogates Rousseau and of Rousseau who interrogates the shape." The "imposition of meaning" that occurs in the repetition of questions ("Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why"; "Then, what is life?...") formulate "an articulated language of cognition by the erasure," that relies on questions that receive only the echo of their interrogation.<sup>63</sup>

But the oceanic end-of-the-poem that marks *The Triumph of Life* is, of course, not its end--only an omission, an interruption that ends in a voided space. Goslee, studying the original Bodleian manuscripts, notes that the poem could have ended quite differently (had Shelley continued to live), since immediately following the echo of the narrator's original query, "Rousseau begins to answer the narrator's question, 'Then, what is Life...?'" with a possible response:

~~the cripple cast~~

His

~~An eye upon the distant car of beams~~

car which now had rolled

Onward, as if that look must be the last

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<sup>63</sup>"Shelley Disfigured," p. 118

And answered ... Happy those for whom the fold

Of

(fol. 52 v., ll. 25-6 and fol. 53 r., ll. 1-5)<sup>64</sup>

The marginal, historically omitted “fold” that pseudo-ends the poem is the turn, the natural *versāre* of verse. (Agamben: “I have elsewhere suggested that the word *versure*, from the Latin term indicating the point at which the plow turns around at the end of the furrow, be given to this essential trait of...verse...”<sup>65</sup>) Rousseau’s suppressed/incomplete dialogue suggests that “Life” is contained, or emerges from, or is resolved by the “fold of [something]”; but we are at a loss to know what this *something* is; we have only its “fold”--literally and figuratively. What might this fold indicate? In the most purely formalist sense, the fold is the prosodic continuation of Shelley’s verse, its folding yet again into itself, as the rhythm dictates; the *terzarima* which Shelley selected to structure *The Triumph of Life* points toward an infinite unfolding of the fold (Dante had invented it precisely for the epic format).<sup>66</sup>

Goslee summarizes two possible interpretations for the “fold”: Donald Reiman, somewhat blandly, theorizes that it “might have been inspired by earlier images of Lucifer as morning-star and Venus as evening-star, the ‘folding-star’ for shepherds...” Denise Gigante offers a more compelling (and persuasive) theory, oriented around “Shelley’s recurrent images of the veil”: “As tissue or textile [the ‘fold’] may be associated with ‘text’--and...with an interpretation of the universe as textile.” Gigante relies on a quote from Leibniz’s *Dialogue on Continuity and Motion* to drive home her point about Shelley’s fundamental grounding in the proliferation of folds and vanished or obscured traces: “The division of the continuum must...be considered...like that of a sheet of paper or tunic into folds...It is just as if we suppose a tunic to be scored with folds multiplied to infinity...such...that there is no fold so small that it

<sup>64</sup>Goslee also makes reference to Donald Reiman’s *Shelley’s ‘The Triumph of Life’: A Critical Study* (*Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, vol. 55 [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965]), an invaluable critical study and editorial commentary on the manuscripts (*Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 215).

<sup>65</sup>*The End of the Poem*, p. 111

<sup>66</sup>The rhythmic scroll-like unfolding of the *terzarima* structure isn’t lost on Goslee: “The sense of a scroll would fit the continuous formal unfolding of the *terzarima* verse form borrowed with all its eschatological weight from Dante” (*Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 192).

is not subdivided by a new fold...”<sup>67</sup> Goslee contributes her own observation that Shelley not only brings into a tension the contrary forces of “rolled” (the outward rolling onward of the Chariot of Life) and “fold” (the inward folding of the narrator/Rousseau into self-reflexivity, or philosophic speculation, or silence) by directly rhyming them (a play of contrary forces common to Shelley’s practice<sup>68</sup>), but Shelley also had drafted this particular passage, along with most sections of *The Triumph of Life*, not in a notebook but “on large sheets of paper folded in half to make two-leaf or four-page units--bifolia,” so that the edited-out section of the “fold” fragment was itself written beneath a literal fold in the page.<sup>69</sup>

Though there is no evidence that Shelley had read or was exposed to Leibniz’s ideas on the fold, the proposition of the fold as an infinite *declination* (a sudden downward turn in a fluvial current that is like a fold, or an infolding, certainly a *disturbance* in the flow in the same way a fold is a disturbance in the page’s smoothness) recalls Shelley’s earliest associations with Lucretian thought. Leibniz’s fold (and some parts of his “monadology”) bear an intense relation to Lucretius’ *clinamen*. We must turn to Deleuze for clarification:

That is what Leibniz explains in an extraordinary piece of writing: a flexible or an elastic body still has cohering parts that form a fold, such that they are not separated into parts of parts but are rather divided to infinity in smaller and smaller folds that always retain a certain cohesion. Thus a continuous labyrinth is not a line dissolving into independent points, as flowing sand might dissolve into grains, but resembles a sheet of paper divided into infinite folds or separated into bending movements, each one determined by the consistent or conspiring surroundings. ‘The division of the continuous must not be taken as of sand dividing into grains, but as that of a sheet of paper or of a tunic in folds, in such a way that an infinite number of folds can be produced, some smaller than others, but without the body ever dissolving into points or minima.’ A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern. The unit of matter, the smallest element of the labyrinth, is the fold, not the point which is never a part, but a simple extremity of the line. That is why parts of matter are masses or aggregates, as a correlative to elastic compressive force. Unfolding is thus not the contrary of folding, but follows the fold up

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<sup>67</sup>In a synchronous moment of infolding footnotes, I am quoting Goslee quoting Gigante quoting Leibniz (Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 216; Leibniz quote from Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism*, [Yale, 2009] pp. 202-203).

<sup>68</sup>One example in *The Triumph of Life* comes to mind: “And near him walk the [ ] twain, / The tutor and his pupil, whom Dominion / Followed as tame as vulture in a chain” (lines 260-262). The rhyming of “twain” with “chain” plays on the double meaning of *twain* as a sundering, but also as a conjunction that semantically rhymes with “chain”; however we take the rhyme, the sense doubles the heat of the resonance.

<sup>69</sup>Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, pp. 187, 215-217

to the following fold. Particles are 'turned into folds,' that a 'contrary effort changes over and again.' Folds of winds, of waters, of fire and earth, and subterranean folds of veins of ore in a mine. In a system of complex interactions, the solid pleats of 'natural geography' refer to the effect first of fire, and then of waters and winds on the earth.<sup>70</sup>

The breathtaking speed with which Leibniz (or, rather, Deleuze reading Leibniz) proceeds from the fold in the page to the “solid pleats of ‘natural geography’ [...] to the effect first of fire, and then of waters and winds on the earth” mimics the Lucretian construction of entire civilizations, global weathers, social and cosmic events, from the basis of the atom, the void, and the swerve which makes and breaks up material states (*clinamen*). The atomic “federations” (the *foedera* or *coniuncta* described by Lucretius<sup>71</sup>) which make up matter are the “masses or aggregates” that folds generate; in Epicurean atomism, it is the *clinamen* which marks the fold, and in Leibnizian physics it is the fold which marks the swerve that allows for climactic productions and changes in nature and societies. In the case of Shelley’s manuscript, the literal/textual fold is the mark or trace on the page that invites philological speculation and interpretative assemblages: “Rather, meanings tends to proliferate endlessly in the promiscuous iterability of the ‘trace,’ or ‘mark,’ an understanding of meaning that Derrida describes as a reemergence of the atomism of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius. The promiscuity of the mark is a function of the ‘atomistique of the letter’ (10), its liability to an atomistic deviation or *clinamen*.”<sup>72</sup>

We may read thus Shelley’s omitted “fold” in a third and different way: it is a sly, infolded return to a Lucretian angle, in the sense that, in spite of the poet’s untimely death, the marginal fold of the poem (a poem which, in the edited version that leaves out the fold, ends only in a typographic void) reiterates the possibility of what Serres calls a Venutian *coniuncta*.<sup>73</sup> If the event of Shelley’s death (gratuitously marked by the suppressed presence of the “fold”)

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<sup>70</sup>Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (New York: Continuum, 2006), trans. Tom Conley, pp. 6-7

<sup>71</sup>“*Coniuncta* and *foedera* are the same word: stable gatherings of elements, of whatever sort” (Serres, “Lucretius: Science & Religion,” p. 114).

<sup>72</sup>Roberts quotes from Derrida’s “Mes Chances: A Rendezvous with Epicurean Stereophonies” (*Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 314).

<sup>73</sup>Conjunction, as in coitus, relates infinitely to the cult of Venus; and *De rerum natura* begins with an invocation to Venus as the true divine force which brings chaos and order into relation.



represents an untimely chance-based advent<sup>74</sup> which the composition of the poem (and the poem itself) had not divined or called for (hence, Shelley's death, marked by the suppression of the fold, interrupts, or *disturbs*, the poem in a deeply textual and meta-textual way), then the "fold" itself, as the principle of Venutian *coniuncta*, outlines an eros which could be called a "triumph" of materiality (of the folio page for instance), of aggregation, assemblage, proliferation, and of the erotic drive which Shelley suggests would be called "Life," the Venutian *foedus* which allows life to occur at all. (Though there is hardly space to make a definite argument for it, I am implying that the "Shape all light" which attracts and perturbs Rousseau [line 352] is in fact Venus, the life principle incarnate as modeled by Lucretius, the erotic charge which goes beyond valuations of good and evil<sup>75</sup>--a Shape which is dangerous, rather than malignant, precisely because it is *hot*, composed of nothing but burning light.<sup>76</sup>)

The cognitive problem which *The Triumph of Life* directly posits, however, is the speed at which Life (the "Shape all light," the "cold bright car," etc.) zooms through the closed field of the poem; the moving parts of Life are too numerous, and the procession too fast, to adequately capture or visually "arrest," even when the poem (Shelley in the vehicular cockpit of the poem) strives to slow it down through "measure"--an action that fails or is subverted twice, first when the Shape-all-light "blot[s] / the thoughts of him who gazed" on "her feet, no less than the sweet tune / To which they moved" ("measure" is equated to both the Shape's dancing feet, and to the "sweet tune" to which they dance, the two becoming imperceptibly mixed [lines 375-388]); and second, when "those / Who lead [the wild dance in the van]--fleet

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<sup>74</sup>Serres crucially points out that "advent" and "event" are words with the same root: "Events, however, are cut out of another cloth [from *coniuncta*]. They come and go. Look at the words themselves: *adventu*, *euente*, they form an unstable flow from their advent to their eventual dispersal (*de l'avental'event*). The atoms flow downstream from upstream, and do not form a *convention*. Events are adventitious, neither uniting nor joining in coitus[...]. Unstable, they flow around the resistant and conjoined centers of objects. They cross, irrevocably, carried along by the flow" ("Lucretius: Science and Religion," p. 115). In Shelley's case, the *event* of his death plays out as an entropic downward flow of atoms, into the depths of the sea, into dispersal.

<sup>75</sup>I shall have to return to this point, since for Shelley the true opposition isn't the Christian moral one of good and evil, but a scientific-casuistic split between "Life" and "Love," in which Life represents the Void, and Love the inclination, or *clinamen*, that aims to fill the void via assemblage, to seek a sympathy with other figurations, a conjunction with another, with the Other, etc.

<sup>76</sup>I am also appealing to Serres' description of Venus, from the perspective of Lucretianism: "These are the primary qualities [weight, heat, and liquidity] of conjunction itself, the qualities of Venus, who weighs, who flows, who is hot" (Ibid, p. 115)

as shadows on the green, / Outspeed the chariot, and without repose / Mix with each other in tempestuous measure / To savage music..." (lines 138-142), a scene that recedes, dims, and eventually leaves everything else in shade. How then does one overcome the blindness of speed ("speed in the van, blindness in the rear" [line 101]) and the darkness that leaves the agonistic behind?

#### V. Holographic Vision in *The Triumph of Life*

We return again to Shelley's *Triumph*, written in Lerici on the Gulf of Spezzia, in the spring/early summer of 1822, the year and season when Shelley drowned and would write no more. The complicated history of the poem, and the maddening cycles of critical exegesis that have been spent on the shores of this most difficult, obstinately irresolvable poem, will be for the moment suspended in the distance. I am mainly concerned with applying a dromoscopic reading on the first forty lines of the poem; perhaps at the end of my brief glimpse at the speed-mechanics at play in this section, I shall be able to hint at the construction of a hologram, according to the extended use I am making of its analogic value for poetic discourse. The point is not to make a random observation about Shelley's relevance to current trends in visual culture and technology, but rather to amplify the range of materials and instruments which could perhaps furnish a 21c emphasis on Shelley's technologies of vision.

Let us begin with the first tercet (the entire poem is written in a *terzarima* structure), which automatically makes speed itself the subject of vision:

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task  
Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth  
Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask<sup>77</sup>

"Swift" is the first word, and as the first word, it immediately situates the alacrity of the tercet on two levels, the semantic and the semiotic (I shall stick to Agamben's terms for the arbitrary division of sense and sound). On the semantic level, "swiftness" qualifies the phenomenal nature of the sun arising on a landscape that is yet not defined; interestingly, the sun is not

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<sup>77</sup> "The Triumph of Life," *Complete Poems*, pp. 545-546

initially described by its quality of giving off light but rather by its quality of shedding or manifesting swiftness, a condition that is not normally attributed to the movement of the sun (or, more correctly, to the movement of the earth revolving around the sun). There is, of course, a scientific/philosophical reason for this: the pure appearance (or *schein*, in Hegelian terms) of any concrete thing owes its manifestation to the light which brings its form and density into being; this sun-light, traveling at the speed of light, is instantaneous, and because it is instantaneous, it is the swiftness of the sun's light which constitutes the nature of light itself. On the semiotic level, the sound and symbol of the alliterative S in "swift" spreads and replicates its effect among a rhythmic gathering of S-shaped or S-sounding words in the tercet:

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task  
Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth  
Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask

There is a marked slow-down in the second line, with the sonic interference of "glory and of good," which in its embedded syntactical placement, acts very much like a G-shaped boulder in the river-stream of alliterative Ss and S-shaped words that course around and flow past the heavy obstacle. "Of glory and of good" juts out because it is heavy, and semantically it works to monumentalize the apparition of the Sun as an ennobling phenomenal act. This miniature moment of syntactic impediment acts like a slight pause or momentary slow-down that exemplifies what Keach meant by the importance of "alternation of speeds." Without the obstacle of the G-unit in the second line, the S-units of "swiftness" and speed would not have been as speedily, that is to say, *spatially*, salient. (Following Virilio, speed remains a matter of space-perception.)

It would be helpful at this point to transcribe the five tercets that follow the first one all together to pursue my line of inquiry, if only to emphasize the spatialization effect which Shelley's optics of speed infuses into a landscape that is "swiftly" (but also quite gradually) revealed by the sun-light of the first tercet:

Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth—  
The smokeless altars of the mountain snows [5]

Flamed **ab**ove **crim**son **cl**ouds, and at the birth

**O**f light, the **O**cean's **o**rison **a**rose,  
 To which the birds tempered their matin lay.  
 All **f**lowers in field **o**r **f**orest which un**cl**ose

Their trembling eyelids to the kiss of day, [10]  
 Swinging their censers in the element,  
 With **o**rient incense lit by the new ray

Burned **s**low and in**co**nsumably, and sent  
 Their **o**dorous sighs up to the smiling air;  
 And, in succession due, did continent, [15]

Isle, ocean, and all things that in them wear  
 The form and character of mortal mould,  
 Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear

Staying on the semiotic level, I have emboldened and italicized the assonant Os that, quite physically, *rise up* from line 14 and spread themselves like smoke or incense on the other syntactic units and morphemes which imitate and proliferate the rising O-sound of the “odorous sighs.” The rising up is important on a semantic level too. Line 5 describes “smokeless altars” that metaphorize the snow-capped mountain peaks upon which the sun makes its primary appearance: they are smokeless because the snow only *looks* like a kind of burning, with the sun perched upon the mountain peaks like a flame, yet no actual smoke rises. There is a second mention of “orient incense” in line 12, this time being “lit by the new ray” and which gradually burns “slow and inconsumably,” sending up “their odorous sighs to the smiling air.” Paying close attention to the ascending-descending toggle of the placement of each syntactic unit, the metaphoric semanticism of the smokeless altars of line 5 is mirrored from below by a metaphoric semiosis of “incense burning,” this time made palpable, and indeed visible, through a slow rise of Os originating at the lower plateau of line 14. This sort of phenomenal play on the semantic and semiotic levels of meaning achieves its effects through a spatialization at once enacted, or manifested, by the placement of the sun, and the swiftness of the sun’s light, at the opening of the poem. The smoke and incense of the Os would not have been as effectively

visualized, or made physical, if the swiftness of the Sun's instantiating light had not first spatialized the poem's landscape through the holographic force of its rays. A picture of landscape is produced, both semantically and semiotically, through the contagious dispersal of the sun's photons on the scene that descends below it.

How does dromoscopic speed show itself in the above tercets? If we recall Agamben's assertion that enjambment characterizes the soul of the poem, which is to say, its perpetual movement forward in search of the oceanic, then we will notice that these first six tercets never in fact end symmetrically or neatly; the first period, or direct pause, occurs in line 8, strikingly, at the moment when the "birds tempered their matin lay," a temperance which suggests a pause or momentary adjustment in music, in flow, in sound. (Just as striking is the fact that the birds pause or temper their lay out of respect for the monotonous, but irresistible sound of the "Ocean's orison," an appearance, quite literally, of oceanic undifferentiation---the chanting birds are temporarily dissolved, mixed into, the mass-music of the ocean's waves; their song plays on the ocean's song.) But line 8 is only the *middle* of the third tercet, not its formal end; in fact, the rest of the forty lines that constitute the prelude to the psychotropic vision of "The Triumph of Life" never end at any of the last lines of each tercet. The second, and last, period of punctuation only arrives at line 40, which curiously, but also tellingly, defaces the final tercet (and briefly interrupts the *terzarima* structure) by adding an extra line, thus changing it into a quatrain. This odd transformation at the end both separates the prelude of the sun from the main body of the poem-vision proper (which begins at line 41), sinking or transplanting the ensuing psychotropism into another mental sphere, and also reflects back upon the mechanics of the enjambment as a continuation of the *terzarimarhyme* scheme (a rhyme scheme which Agamben suggests provided poets like Dante an infinite grid for the construction of worlds within worlds). The interruption of the final quatrain (lines 37-40), much like the impediment of the G-unit boulder that slowed down the advance of the S-sound rhythmic scheme, works to accentuate the alternation from one stanza form (tercet) to another (quatrain), as a way of bringing to light the efficacy of the enjambment device through its sudden absence or full-stop. The alternation of speeds thus mirrors the alternation of

stanzaic forms; line 40 acts like a red stoplight at the intersection into another realm of speed (“And then a vision on my brain was rolled”).

There is one more “hologram” to investigate before we shift gears. Just like with the first five tercets, I shall need to transcribe the last seven tercets (leaving out lines 16-18, for economy’s sake) to fully visualize the spatial light-field that Shelley builds up:

Their portion of the toil, which he of old  
Took as his own, and then imposed on them: [20]  
But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold

Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem  
The cone of night, now they were laid asleep  
Stretched my faint limbs beneath the hoary stem

Which an old chestnut flung athwart the steep [25]  
Of a green Apennine: **before me** fled  
**The night**; *behind* me rose *the day*; the deep

Was at my feet, and **Heaven** above my **head**,—  
When a strange trance over my fancy grew  
Which was not slumber, for the shade it spread [30]

Was so transparent, that the scene came through  
As clear as when a veil of light is drawn  
O'er evening hills they glimmer; and I knew

That I had felt the freshness of that dawn  
Bathe in the same cold dew my brow and hair, [35]  
And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn

Under the self-same bough, and heard as there  
The birds, the fountains and the ocean hold  
Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air,  
And then a vision on my brain was rolled. [40]

I have given especial attention to lines 26-28 because a very crafty type of spatialization occurs in this section. My reading can be considered highly arbitrary, but it at least gives

another indication of what I call “holographic poetics.” The appearance of the speaker occurs in line 21, with the “But I...,” a speaker who eventually succumbs to “a vision” in line 40. The late appearance of the speaker in the poem is significant for two reasons: one, it demonstrates, at least in the world of *The Triumph of Life*, the secondary nature of the human speaker who is confronted with the unrolling of the phenomenal realm that occurs throughout lines 1-20. This is to say, the phenomenal realm, for Shelley the materialist (and later, as I shall argue, Shelley the Lucretian atomist), precedes and gives “birth” to the speaker, in the same sense that Shelley argued that the “mind deserves to be considered as the effect rather than the cause of motion.” If the swiftness of the sun, which is the speed of light at which things become visible, brings the phenomenal realm into joyous play, then the mind too, set further down the chain of appearances, happens to be the “effect” of the sun’s causal dispersal of rays. This casual image proposes a clever, highly materialist inversion of the Great Chain of Being which many deists argued for, and which Shelley would rectify or improve upon through his poetic practice. But the late appearance of the speaker, particularly in the speaker’s pronouncement that his “thoughts...must remain untold,” posits another level of mental activity which acts negatively against the phenomenal realm, a realm of speeds that, as we shall see in a later discussion of the poem, threatens the autonomy of the mental existence of the speaker. If the phenomenal realm precedes the speaker’s I-ness, then the phenomenal realm also threatens to erode the stability of the I, as the swift rays of the sun stream and course past it, eventually taking it like a river toward the oceanic dispersal that occurs at the end of the poem (there is much to be said about the relation of oceanic differentiation to Shelley’s actual drowning by water, which permanently interrupted the completion of *The Triumph of Life*).

In any case, the “I” of line 21 appears transformed into a “Me” in lines 26-28. Exchanging the normative accentual-syllabic analysis of the poem’s speed-mechanics for a more cognitive spatio-perceptual approach, we can divide lines 26-28 into four distinct syntactic unit-placements: 1) “*before* me fled / The night”; 2) “*behind* me rose the day”; 3) “the deep / Was *at* my feet”; 4) “and Heaven *above* my head.” These syntactic units are spatial-oriented images that are informed by their prepositional placements (which I have indicated by italicizing the prepositions). The placement and enjambment/separation of the syntactic units

are very revealing. On a primary level, now that we have extracted the units from their ordination in the poem, we will notice that the two negative images (“The night”; “the deep”) are characterized---perhaps unconsciously, perhaps not---by an enjambment that splits but runs onto the two units: the “night” and the “deep” are separated from their respective predicates. The positive images of “the day” and “Heaven,” meanwhile, are left intact with their predicates, as it were, in a holistic way. The “night” and the “deep” sunder, or are sundered from, their objects, thus indicating their own light-less negativity, but the “day” and “Heaven” unify, or are united to, their objects, in the same way that the “swift Sun” at the beginning of the poem brightens, unifies, and connects each natural object to other objects in the opening of the phenomenal field.

On a secondary, yet more essential, level, the prepositional placements are *physically* and *spatially* subverted by the dislocations of their referents. Citing the vandalism of underlining, embolding, and italicizing that I committed above in lines 26-28, we will notice that unit 1 (“before me fled / The night”) does not fulfill its descriptive function in any corporeal way. “The night” fleeing and running *after* the “before me fled” unit above it, actually does not come *before* the “me,” but runs *behind* it. The same applies to “behind me rose the day,” a prepositional statement that is subverted by the fact that “the day” (syntactically speaking) actually rises *in front* of the “me.” “The deep” which is supposed to be “at” the speaker’s feet, actually appears *above* it, in line 27. Line 28, meanwhile, proffers the most inventive subversion of prepositional intent by placing “Heaven” at the same level as the speaker’s “head”: heaven is not above the speaker but very much on the same plane of perception as the speaker’s head, that is to say, the mind. As a self-avowed atheist, Shelley would no doubt have found pleasure in creating such novel, internal, deeply materialist ways of demonstrating the underpinnings of his philosophical beliefs in the very *space* of the poem. Like in the recording of a holograph, the placement of each prepositional unit no longer appears as a two-dimensional image of textual performativity (such as would be exhibited in a photograph); rather, the spatial *density* of each syntactic unit is brought into relief, and we gain a nearly three-dimensional exposure of the poem’s spatialization on an equally semantic and semiotic level.



What ultimately does the disjunction between the first 40 lines and the rest of the poem signify? The poem, unfinished, would perhaps have ended in a coda that returned to the narratorial “I, [whose] thoughts...must remain untold”; but the massive and ocean-sized lacuna that the poem ends with permits us to make a few speculations. One possibility: the strange disjunction locationally situates the narrator-speaker (Shelley’s aesthetic “I/eye”) in a topographically assigned area that lies apart from the main body of the poem, *as a topos* and *in a topos*. This is a point that Derrida brings up in his essay on *The Triumph of Life*:

*There is the double narrative, the narrative of the vision enclosed in the general narrative carried on by the same narrator. The line that separates the enclosed narrative from the other--*

And then a Vision on my brain was rolled.

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--marks the upper edge of a space that will never be closed. What is the *topos* of the ‘I’ who quotes himself in a narrative {of a dream, a vision, or a hallucination} within a narrative, including, in addition to all his ghosts, his *hallucinations of ghosts*, still other visions within visions (e.g., ‘a new Vision never seen before’)? What is his *topos* when he quotes, in the present, a past question formulated in another sort of present {‘...“Then, what is Life?” I said...’} and which he narrates as something that presented itself in a vision, and so on?<sup>78</sup>

We may read Derrida’s “hallucinations of ghosts” as an extension of our present experiment with holography: the hallucination fits our description of a hologram, that is, an immaterial materializing of a past event through a measured disturbance of light (it is light after all which stages and designs the whole holographic space of the prelude). The hologram is an extension in space of the conditions which gave birth to an event, and the event is itself defined by this extension: “That is clearly the first component or condition of..the event: *extension*. Extension exists when one element is stretched over the following ones, such that it is a whole and the following elements are its parts.”<sup>79</sup> The rupture between the first 40 lines marks this initial section as a separate hologram (a “whole message”) disembedded from the

<sup>78</sup>Derrida, “Living On/Border Lines” (in *Deconstruction and Criticism* [New York: Continuum, 1979]) pp. 85-86, quoted by Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 218

<sup>79</sup>Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 87

extensiveness of the poem proper (in this case, a partial, an unfinished, or a lost message whose transmission had been interrupted), even as the 40-line prelude embeds a mysterious declarative that remains unexplained: “But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold / Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem / The cone of night...” Why this unveiling of the narratorial “I” if it only comes on the condition that his inner thoughts remain veiled?

The ghostly shell of the narratorial “I” masks in itself the hallucination of yet another ghost; in a word, we have come across Lucretius’ simulacra yet again, the image that sheds a holographic skin and the holographic skin which poses as the real object: “The definition we make to ourselves of the nature of that skin posits a certain ‘envelope’ within which the ‘real’ object must exist. But the envelope is always too large. Just as no real-world trajectory can be determined with sufficient precision to exclude tangential deviation, there is always an infinite number of other possible envelopes between the one we posit and the ‘real’ object. That ‘border’ of envelopes represents a fractal coastline of infinite complexity.”<sup>80</sup> Equally so, the line that fascinates Derrida, and which divides the 40-line prelude from the poem proper, represents a border, a simulacral envelope that covers yet another simulacrum, another hologram--we are at a loss not only about what “thoughts...must remain untold” but also about what transpires in the gulf that separates line 40 (“And then a vision on my brain was rolled”) from lines 41-42 (“As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay, / This was the tenour of my waking dream..”).

If the two sections are connected, why the divisional line--does Shelley mean to place us in a permanent skepticism? The opening of the poem comes to be as “oceanic” as the obliterated end: there is no beginning in sight, since there too is no end. In keeping with Lucretian physics, the formerly secure opening of the poem outlines a “fractal coastline of infinite complexity” from which the reader (like Shelley, or the narratorial “I”) is motivated to adopt an Epicurean stance and gaze in “joy” on “the strong winds of storm / Stir up the waters of a mighty sea” (the *suave marimagno* of poetic revelation). If it is conceivable to think of the poet as an unacknowledged *holographer* of the world, then *The Triumph of Life* may be “proposing a theory of the text as a hermeneutical fractal,” as a reading manual whose

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<sup>80</sup>Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 316

velocities, hallucinations, and lacunae push the reader toward Lucretian cognition. If the hologram of life can be observed, then it can be, perchance, traced back to yet another hologram, another false lead, an empty void in which atoms collect, disperse, and create a proliferation of meanings: “Like the Lucretian object presented to the eye, the literary text, ever revealing new meanings/veils in the light of the ‘peculiar relations’ of its context of consumption, never appears twice in exactly the same way. Any one reading of the text is a ‘veil’ that may conform more or less adequately to the ‘reality’ of the text but that always leaves room for an infinite number of other ‘veils’--other valid descriptions of the work.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 317

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