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Emerson's Idealist Poetics: Emerson, Rödl, and the Life of Nature

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**EMERSON'S IDEALIST POETICS:
EMERSON, RÖDL, AND THE LIFE OF *NATURE***

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I articulate a hermeneutics for reading Ralph Waldo Emerson's seminal text *Nature* through drawing on the insights of the contemporary philosopher Sebastian Rödl. Particularly, the performative, literary characteristics of Rödl's quite conceptual work resonate with the poetic strategies that Emerson employs in *Nature*. In the section on the work of Rödl, I make the performative aspects of his philosophy explicit through a close reading of the way self-consciousness happens in his texts through the language he employs. Rödl refers to his elucidation of self-consciousness as idealism. In the section on Emerson, I show how Emerson's project of engaging and transforming the individual soul also rests upon a performative idealism that occurs within his writing. Thus, I demonstrate how Emerson transforms the idealism that he inherited from such thinkers as Coleridge and Kant into a poetics of transcendence. The aims of this work point in the directions of heightening the value of Emerson's texts beyond their historical importance, showing the significance of idealism for both literature and philosophy, and establishing a communication between literature and philosophy along the lines of the poetics of idealism.

Chapter 1. Introduction

A. The Problem of Emerson's Poetics

Emerson's *Nature* is not really about nature. *Nature's* chapter headings, after its introduction and self-named first chapter, enumerate "Commodity," "Beauty," "Language," "Discipline," "Idealism," "Spirit," and "Prospects" as its specific concerns: we might have expected "Rocks," "Water," "Plants," "Animals," "Weather," "Planets," and "The Cosmos." The things and concepts Emerson names are essential to human mind and culture, not nature, at least in the traditional sense of this term. If, however, we remember that *Nature* is a work steeped in the tradition of German idealism, then its focus on the primacy of human consciousness and essential human concepts hardly seems surprising. In his lecture "The Transcendentalist," Emerson explains this reorientation of the idealist's approach to describing the world by contrasting it to the approach of the materialist:

In the order of thought, the materialist takes his departure from the external world, and esteems a man as one product of that. The idealist takes his departure from his consciousness, and reckons the world an appearance. . . Mind is the only reality, of which men and all other natures are better or worse reflectors. Nature, literature, history, are only subjective phenomena. . . His thought, — that is the Universe.
(*TCRWE* I, 203)

Here, Emerson provides us with an elementary dialectical elucidation of his approach in *Nature*. Whereas the materialist views herself and the world from a third-person perspective, the idealist begins with the first-person perspective (whether singular or plural) and orders all appearances in terms of its outward directed arrow. To use my pair of my examples from above, to understand "Rocks,"

the idealist would ask how we first encounter rocks as relevant appearances (for instance, the relevance of flint for starting fires), rather than assessing them in light of their neutral material being. “Water,” as well, always appears for me first in its value for slaking thirst and the beauty and sublimity offered by its scintillations and vast expanses, etc., and if I want to study its chemical properties as H₂O, I only do so through the discipline of a science that allows me to discern an elegant molecular geometry.

In this lecture, though it is nowhere nearly as poetically reflective as the great passages from *Nature*, Emerson is extremely subtle and consistent. In the next sentence following the passage above, Emerson implicitly indicates that we should not consider even “Transcendentalism” as a subject of neutral intellectual interest but should rather encounter it through its relevance for us: “From this transfer of the world into the consciousness, this beholding of all things in the mind, follow easily his whole ethics. It is simpler to be self-dependent.”

Transcendentalism is not merely an account of the mind’s relation to the world but rather an account of this *for* the subject in her pursuit of autonomy. In a parallel move later in the essay, he acknowledges that “the Idealism of the present day acquired the name of Transcendental, from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant, of Konigsberg” and gives a brief philosophical genealogy of the term, only to transfigure it in the next paragraph once again:

Although, as we have said, there is no pure Transcendentalist, yet the tendency to respect the intuitions, and to give them, at least in our creed, all authority over our experience, has deeply colored the conversation and poetry of the present day; and the history of genius

and of religion in these times, though impure, and as yet not incarnated in any powerful individual, will be the history of this tendency. (*TCRWE* I, 207)

No one is a “pure” transcendentalist, since sensory affection and the call of material interests are always present, sometimes pressing in such a demanding way that individuals forget themselves and pretend to think of a world without them in it, but here, Emerson follows the articulation of transcendentalism from a theory into a calling, an orientation seeking an incarnation on her way to being poetized within a history of genius, transfigured beyond the body, a spirit waiting for others to inspire. If we place Emerson along such a path, we will witness him change from Emerson the man into Emerson the idea, an idea that travels from him to us on the way to our inheritance of it within the creative projection of our ideal selves.

The main argument of this essay is that Emerson’s *Nature* composes its own sophisticated idealist poetics. The idealism within these poetics is not merely inherited from metaphysical idealists such as Berkeley or German idealists such as Kant and Fichte, although Emerson was variously influenced by their thought. Rather, the brilliance of Emerson’s idealist poetics consists in its blending the project of the self-consciousness of the subject together with a poetic language of self-figuration (figuration as artistic creation and as representation, a sounding of the “unsounded centre,” finding its voice, founding its call). Part of the work in making my argument will involve showing how Emerson deploys these blended configurations in his work. This will require me to take a micrological approach, one focusing on dense or subtle junctures in Emerson’s language at the expense of

discussing broad themes or contexts, although I do not consider this to be a close reading in the new critical sense. Sometimes, disclosing the operations within these configurations will involve going beyond Emerson into historical comparisons with other works, such as philosophical texts or poems. Sometimes, this will require the invention or retrieval of meditations connected with the articulation of self-consciousness. The main thing I want to demonstrate is that Emerson articulates a sophisticated idealist poetics, and achieving that goal requires attentiveness to the surface working of his language (his metaphorical plays and juxtapositions, his elucidatory re-phrasings of conventional expressions, and his constructions of new models through which to understand experience, for instance) rather than the tracing of historical causes and influences. What matters most is what he does (for himself, to himself, for others, to others, to us) through his mode of articulation.

If we are to esteem the idealist poetics within Emerson's work, we must be able to esteem it as valuable for ourselves. There are an indefinite number of ways of doing this. For instance, I could, in Emerson's terms, defend his writing as valuable for me in my personal life, detailing the rapturous affective reveries afforded through my reading him through transcendently tinged glasses. Within an academic essay, however, I implicitly commit myself to a different standard of value than that of the merely personal: the value of intellectual integrity within a responsive community of serious, educated individuals. In defending the value of Emerson's sophisticated idealist poetics, "I" would have to defend it to "them," and its defense would involve the projective creation of an us.

The mode of doing this I choose is one resonant with Emerson's hermeneutics of history that brings us closer to it and it closer to us in a revolution of transtemporal communication, where harmony and relevance matter more than historical proximity. I aim to show how Emerson communicates with us and how we can communicate with him through the apparatus of the idealism of our own time. In fact, the reports of the death of idealism have been greatly exaggerated. Here, I do not mean that idealism lives on in the post-idealist traditions of phenomenology, existentialism, and post-structuralism, although this is to a certain extent true. As well, I do not mean that German idealism still lives on through historical interest in its study and even through the interpretive defense of its historical relevance, for instance in the excellent work of Robert Pippin on the idealism of Hegel. Rather, I wish to establish a rapport between the work of Emerson and the work of the most significant idealist of our time, Sebastian Rödl. Rödl is a German philosopher who writes in the analytic tradition, the author of three substantial works published by Harvard University Press, a growing philosophical presence with seminars and workshops dedicated to his work, and a self-professed absolute idealist. Because there is a relative chasm between literary studies and works of current relevance in the analytic tradition in philosophy, it is not surprising that Emerson (or other literary figures) have not been interpreted in light of Rödl's work, but this chasm provides me with the opportunity to construct a bridge.

For the purpose of drawing this connection, I will have to introduce the reader to the work of Rödl, and I will do this at the end of this introduction, as well as contextually, within my interpretive defenses of Emerson's works. There are three important characteristics of Rödl's project, other than the fact that it contains the most significant contemporary inheritance and projection of idealist thought, that bring it into direct communication with Emerson's writing.

- 1.) Rödl's understanding of idealism, since it comes through an inherited formulation within the analytic tradition of philosophy, is primarily linguistic, rather than dialectical or phenomenological or psychological, for instance. Rödl, explicates and defends idealism with an attentiveness to its affirming, self-conscious inscription within a philosophical language attuned to the working of language throughout human experience. Although Rödl does not call himself a linguistic idealist, he could be said to practice a linguistic idealism, if one has an appropriately sophisticated notion of language and the role of self-consciousness in such an idealism. Emerson's writing, I argue, articulates an idealist poetics, one whose sense and defense also involves careful attentiveness to its self-conscious inscription. Rödl's channeling of idealism through the passage of the careful, self-conscious analysis of language and Emerson's channeling of idealism through the passage of the careful, self-conscious figuration of the poetic place them within a natural site of mutual interflow.
- 2.) Rödl's idealism has significant influences from the Emersonian lineage of American pragmatism. Two of the most significant figures that Rödl draws

upon in the positioning of his work are Wilfred Sellars and Robert Brandom, both of whom owe significant debts not only to the tradition of German Idealism but also to the tradition of American pragmatism. Sellars's critique of the Myth of the Given, which draws on Kant, Hegel, Peirce, and Dewey, as much as on Wittgenstein and Austin, forms the basis of much recent analytic work. Robert Brandom is perhaps the most influential living analytic philosopher, and his analytic pragmatism, as the name suggests, draws heavily on works such as Dewey's *Logic* and the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty (his thesis advisor), as well as the idealism of Kant and Hegel (whom he reinterprets, in a variety of historical essays, in light of his analytic pragmatism). The important point here is that the Peircian semiotics, already largely implicit in Emerson's understanding of the symbol, and the Deweyan *a priori* social relatedness of the subject, already largely implicit in Emerson's understanding of society and history, transmit throughout these discussions a sort of meta-Emersonianism, and this meta-Emersonian pragmatic idealism pervades Rödl's work as well, although translated into his own unique language. Thus, placing Rödl in communication with Emerson does not merely involve the application of a theory in order to interpret the literary text—rather, it involves allowing an Americanized idealism to return to itself, enabling it to represent itself in a more systematic if not sophisticated form from the vantage of its tomorrow.

- 3.) The third characteristic that brings the work of Rödl into communication with Emerson, over and above their shared commitment to idealism, is largely a

function of the first two characteristics, as well as this shared commitment, and this characteristic involves the always intense, usually enigmatic, sometimes overbearingly profound poetic awareness of their own language as it unfolds (as) their thought. This awareness, however, takes place in radically different manners in their work. In Rödl's work, the self-knowledge afforded by philosophy, which he, in classic idealist fashion calls "*the science*," (not a phrase that one would often hear in a textbook of literary theory) is already implicit within any substantial manifestation of human life, such as having a conversation, playing a game, or going to the store. What Rödl does in his work is to articulate this self-consciousness, always already at work, within a philosophical formulation that partially completes this self-consciousness and partially operates as a countermeasure to our incessant urge to misunderstand it. In order to do this, Rödl constantly avoids merely describing things or processes from the outside but rather records (gesturally, one might say poetically) his own self-conscious activity in whatever he writes. Writing in and through awareness of one's own linguistic activity is, of course, not unique to Rödl (although his way of doing it (as well as his hiding of it) is nearly as strange as Wittgenstein's) but rather unites him in a strange community with philosophers such as Derrida, Blanchot, and Nietzsche and poets such as Stevens and Ashbery. And Emerson. In my prefiguring reading of Rödl, I will be attentive to the way in which Rödl's philosophy unfolds in poetic fashion, one resonant with the poetic thought of Emerson, and in the reading of Emerson

following my introduction of Rödl's thought, I will take hermeneutic inspiration from the theoretical intricacy of Rödl's analytic poesis in order to help us receive, as relevant, the more figurative but not less difficult poetic thought of Emerson.

B. Emerson's Ghosts

There is something Emerson's quasi-idealist and quasi-poetic great essays that haunts us. Randall Fuller, in *Emerson's Ghosts: Literature, Politics, and the Making of Americanists*, notes the haunting quality of Emerson's texts:

Emersonian hauntings are generated . . . within the volatile transaction between readers and an aesthetic mode that encourages perceptual transformation while remaining multivalent enough to suggest numerous, and often conflicting, transformations. These hauntings achieve their most salient effects by suggesting ways of opposing or critiquing the often disappointing actuality of American modernity—a modernity that sometimes seems relentless in its efforts to colonize or limit thought and action. (*EG*, 4)

Fuller finds Emerson's writing, for instance, simultaneously to instantiate the truths of the ideology of American individualism and exceptionalism, drawing forth critics such as Sacvan Bercovitch to locate these truths as emblems of this ideology, while at the same time offering an internal displacement of their own ideological functioning, affording a possibility of dissent towards the American dream from within its voicing. We can see this nowhere more clearly than in the preface to the 2012 edition of *The American Jeremiad*, where we find Bercovitch citing Emerson in an odd manner:

The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy ... than any kingdom in history.... The root and seed of democracy is the doctrine, Judge for yourself. Reverence thyself. It is the inevitable

effect of that doctrine, where it has any effect, ... to make each man a state.... “How is the king greater than I, if he is not more just?” ... There is a revolution ... taking effect around us, ... the greatest of all revolutions which have ever occurred; that, namely, which has ... demand[ed] a faith satisfactory to [the individual’s] own proper nature.... Man begins to hear a voice that fills the heavens and the earth, saying that God is within him; that there is the celestial host. (*AJ 2012*, xxxi: ellipses in original)

Concerning this passage, Bercovitch concludes, “This is ideology at work, within cultural structures that had evolved over two centuries and more—ideology as I found it in the mid-1960s, as I find it today.” The odd thing about this cited passage is that it is found nowhere in Emerson’s corpus, at least as a part of a single text. Normally, ellipses such as Bercovitch uses above indicate the elision of words or sentences from within a single text from which the citation is drawn, but Bercovitch constructs this passage by drawing from multiple Emersonian texts (including sermons and journal entries), starting with “The American Scholar” (“The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy”). Here, Bercovitch is not attempting to cite Emerson correctly and failing at it. Rather, in this assembled passage, he seeks to distill the essence of Emerson’s thought through the connection of disparate segments into a new exemplary text. While locating Emerson within the confines of American ideology, Bercovitch, in a quite Emersonian fashion, poetizes, creating from Emerson’s *oeuvre* a strange semi-connected, semi-disjoined meditation on individual sovereignty as it functions within the American dream. Bercovitch is so successful at his alchemy that even within this synthesized text, we can also hear Emerson’s voices in the characteristic dissonance found in any of his best essays. In Bercovitch’s assemblage, we both

receive a call for action—"to make each man a state"—and the acknowledgement of a passive reception of that which is to come—"Man begins to hear a voice." We find, on the one hand, a content distilled from Emerson's work that can be easily located within the ideological history of American exceptionalism, both in terms of the exceptionality of the (white male) American individual and the exceptionality of the America he represents (in the invocations of "revolution" and "democracy") but on the other hand, we encounter a style at war with itself, awaiting to become other than it is, perhaps prophesying a new individual not beholden to the strict order of identity.

But how are we to understand this stylistic "haunting" of Emerson's work that Fuller indicates and that we find to inspire Bercovitch above? It is one thing to say that a work resists easy interpretation and, thus, that it remains to haunt whatever is said about it, and it is quite another to determine the specific nature of this haunting. Of course, we are always already haunted by the materiality of the dead, whether of the corpse or the dead letter. But what is it about this corpse or letter that haunts us? Is it, for instance, the voicelessness of the dead, whether letter or body, that reveals to us the ever-imminent possibility of our own death? Is it the passivity of the dead body, whether corpse or word, that allows their receivers and carriers to do whatever they wish with these remains, precisely because these things have no more life left within them? Or, by contrast, are we haunted in our encounter with the dead body or letter by a remnant of the spirit, still somehow inspiring, despite its grave circumstances?

Robert D. Richardson opens his biography *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* with an account of a twenty-eight-year-old Emerson opening the coffin of his wife Ellen, who had died fourteen months prior from tuberculosis. Richardson reassures us that Emerson's action was not psychopathological, noting, "Opening the coffin was not a grisly gothic gesture, not just the wild aberration of an unhinged lover. What Emerson was doing was not unheard of." Richardson also indicates that minister James Freeman Clarke and Rufus Griswold "did the same thing," before speculating on Emerson's motivations for this act:

The act was essential Emerson. He had to see for himself. Some part of him was not able to believe she was dead. He was still writing to her in his journals as though she was alive. Perhaps the very deadness of the body would help a belief in the life of the spirit. A modern writer has said that "beside the corpse of the beloved were generated not only the idea of the soul, the belief in immortality, and a great part of man's deep-rooted sense of guilt, but also the earliest inkling of ethical law." We do not know exactly what moved Emerson on this occasion, but we do know that he had a powerful craving for direct, personal, unmediated experience. That is what he meant when he insisted that one should strive for an original relation to the universe. (Richardson, 3)

As Richardson states, we do not know Emerson's own reasons for doing what he did, since he left no record regarding these reasons. Even if he had left a record, it would be (to us) a dead thing that we would have to interpret. Suppose, for instance, Emerson had inscribed a journal entry, explaining that he wanted to see his wife's dead body in order to experience more fully her spirit moving through the life of his present. Could we legitimately take him at his word in such a case? Psychopathology often disguises itself with the mask of reason. What are our choices here? Do we have to acknowledge that, after all, dead is dead, so any

attempt to find spirit where none abides is, in fact, pathological? Do we take Richardson's dialectical interpretation of Emerson as approaching the dead in order to find "the life of the spirit" as itself a repression or avoidance of the meaningless contingency of materiality itself? Or can we find a way to interpret Emerson's actions, insofar as they were directed towards spirit, like Richardson hypothesizes, as sanely enlightened?

There is something within us, as moderns, that makes us see any invocation of the spiritual within the material-historical parameters of human life as ideological delusion or deception. Our sophisticated modernity requires us to leave our soulful naivete at the door and practice hermeneutics of suspicion towards any attempt to commune with the dead. When Bercovitch hears Emerson say, "Man begins to hear a voice that fills the heavens and the earth, saying that God is within him; that there is the celestial host," how could he, as a modern (materialist, historically oriented, critical) intellectual *not* hear this phrase as an ideological edict, precisely designed to eternalize a present conception of life, whether of the industrious capitalist producer or the patriotically-driven expansionist or withdrawn bourgeois self-fashioner? How could Bercovitch *not* read Emerson suspiciously, as misunderstanding what the ideological order of society requires him to do as the divine transcendence of this very same social order?

When we analyze texts and actions in this modern critical-historical fashion, we do so in the spirit of empiricism. We can define empiricism as an intellectual doctrine in the following manner: the only truths that we can have are those given

to us by means of the senses. The developments of this doctrine in the history of critical thought are complicated and multi-faceted. They range from the turning away from Aristotelian metaphysics towards the search for empirical evidence in the sciences to the replacement of the idea of mind as a soul substance mirroring essences with the mind as the site of the of the reception and synthesis of sensory data to the understanding of meaning within language as being afforded by sensory content attached to a linguistic vehicle. Importantly, however, all variations of empiricism, by definition, involve the rejection of any metaphysical transcendence (including all reference to metaphysical knowledge or metaphysical beings) in the service of an affirmation of the immanence of human knowledge: human sensation provides us with the only truths we have.

To say that human knowledge is immanent is to say that this knowledge is a function of the sensory apparatuses of human beings, as well as the implementation and coordination of those apparatuses within human historical practice: the educational and technological directing of human bodies. For instance, Bercovitch's finding of Emerson's appeal to "the celestial host" as "ideology at work" is nothing other than an empiricist situation of professed transcendence within an earthly environment, where appeals to gods and angels and divine imperatives become identified with appeals to sensible things—powerful people and institutions and laws, and the professed transcendence of these things actually serves to reinforce quite mundane deployments of power. Ideology, in this intellectually empiricist understanding, is the immanent domination of human beings that clothes itself in

the garb of the transcendent: this garb itself not only hides this domination but also intensifies it. Art, as the wardrobe of ideology, not only covers that ideology but also, through this very aesthetic presentation, beautiful or horrific, inspires reverence towards or fear of the forces of domination, pulling those within its web even further into its consumptive center.

Was ideology at play in Emerson's visit to Ellen's tomb, if he did intend to find there "the life of the spirit?" Does every minister, even one as theologically liberal as Emerson was in his early pastoral career, trade primarily in ideology? Was Emerson's writing, yoked within a voice of divine promise, with its appeal to ever-transcending circles and horizon-encompassing eyes and futures ever to come, transmitted as nothing other than an ideological vehicle? Intellectually, insofar we are empiricists like Bercovitch, we must answer these questions in the affirmative. Furthermore, there is something underlying our capacity for intellectual assessment that requires such an answer. In our practical bearing towards ourselves and our world, as modern beings, we are concretely formed in the spirit of empiricism. As empiricists, insofar as we receive our truths only through the senses, we must already find ourselves appropriately positioned for this receptivity to function appropriately. This empiricist positioning happens in every subject-forming dimension of modern society, with the most important of these dimensions including the educational, the economic, and the aesthetic.

Educationally, it is not merely the fact that we receive our lessons through seeing, hearing, and touching that forms us as practical empiricists. The necessity

of sensory receptivity towards our environment has nothing to do with *empiricism* as a driving orientation. Even the mystic who sits alone in her hut and reads sacred texts in order to inspire visions of the gods uses her eyes to read, or her fingers, if she is blind. We are trained from an early age not only to read but also to do the following: 1. Quietly sit in place. 2. Passively receive all primary input from an active source. 3. Mechanically reproduce and re-assemble what we have learned, mostly through direct memorization and recall. 4. Restrict all spontaneous imaginative activity to ever decreasing spaces, in the withdrawn zones of daydreams and recess. Our hypothetical mystic may withdraw into her hut, but she does this so she can encounter the gods in all her everyday interactions. As educationally molded empiricists from quite non-progressive classrooms, we are formed as reluctant to the point of being unable to engage situations inspirationally. We are skeptical of forms of life that do not attend to their world critically and passively and who do not understand themselves to possess subjectivity primarily in virtue of these empiricist capacities.

Economically, this situation of passivity comes to be reinforced within routinized labor carried out according to a system of bureaucratic rules designed to mechanize individual production for maximal efficiency. There is generally more freedom of decision-making and possibility of creation in white collar and academic labor, but this bureaucratization of the individual generally cuts across the divide between the rich and the poor, as well as between the educated and the uneducated. This channeling of production simultaneously orders the individual to receive “work

orders” and to respond to “the working environment,” while using as little individual thinking as possible. Even producers of screenplays must employ standardized formats and plots developments, so even in the most “creative” arenas, the work required forces those creators to behave as functional intermediaries, receiving given data and orders and outputting accordingly. This entire productive process, in whatever job, accomplishes the “vanishing of the self” more effectively than Zen Buddhism could ever hope to achieve, although somehow, even after the self has vanished in these instances, pure suffering occupies the place of its departure.

Aesthetically, outside of school and work, we are ordered to seek enjoyment through the passive reception of media, eschewing the efforts of creative projects in favor of a listing of the cultural products we have consumed as our entertainment food. We are quite literally made into empiricists in the modern world, since most of what we do involves interaction with digital screens towards which we stare incessantly, and even our “surfing” upon the digital waves presented to us less resembles actual surfing and more resembles the activity of a mouse, as it moves from one box to another in a pre-planned maze, constantly in search of the same food, day after day. When we do undertake criticism of what we have consumed, this criticism itself mostly takes the guise of the expression of “likes” and “dislikes,” where any radical departure from the norm of interpretation is dissuaded. If something is bad, we say it is a “rotten tomato,” and if it is good, then it is “fresh,” ready to be eaten again and again.

These dimensions (which will be variously discussed in my reading of Emerson), of course, do not stem directly from the theory that sensory impressions are the basic constituents of the human mind or from a basic representational theory of knowledge. And yet, these dimensions shape the embodied subject so that it functionally affirms these theories within its lived existence, even if that subject superficially professes transcendent spirituality or a commitment to creative engagements with the world. The empiricism of the scientist, insofar as she prizes the data of the senses over mere speculation, represents a less intensive empiricism than that with which most people are involved, since she gets to affirm her commitment to the senses self-consciously. The empiricism of the everyday working, enjoying, learning person constitutes the focal point of its realization in modern life. To put this in Bercovitch's terms, in a paradoxical sense, on the one hand, the appeal to the non-sensory transcendence of metaphysics is nothing other than ideology, but the commitment to empiricism that funds the very critique of this metaphysics as ideology is nothing other than ideology: empiricism is the primary ideology of modern life.

There is an existential correlation of empiricism as ideology with the holding of empiricism as an intellectual doctrine. Even though we must say, as empiricists, that denying the metaphysical substantiality of subjectivity was for us an achievement, this denial was possible only based on an operating ideology that pacifies to the point of extinguishing subjectivity in its capacity for transcending power. The understanding of the subject as "something constructed" through

culture and history and context, all of which avail themselves of sensory confirmation, presupposes the a priori construction of the theoretical subject as that which is beholden to these structures of pacification. Even though there is no essential audience for any work (and as empiricists, we must make this claim), I propose that a significant target of both Rödl's philosophy and Emerson's essays is that audience of empiricists residing within us. In our everyday lives, proximally and for the most part, we engage with each other and the world via empiricist personae. Insofar as we find ourselves as an audience haunted by Emerson's work (and by Rödl's), then this would presuppose that there is something within us that can be spoken to that resists or differs from or transcends these empiricist personae that we display proximally and for the most part.

C. The Writing of Spontaneity

A natural enough understanding of idealism, insofar as it counters the passive receptivity of empiricism, is that it takes place as a writing of spontaneity and, thus, bears witness to the a priori synthetic activity of the subject. But is Emerson a writer of spontaneity? We must immediately further specify this question, since every writer technically counts as "a writer of spontaneity." All writers are, by definition, capable of using language, and language use presupposes direct engagement with spontaneity in its occurrence. More concretely, we could ask, "Is Emerson a self-conscious writer of spontaneity?" All language harbors implicit self-consciousness, but "a self-conscious writer of spontaneity" would be one who makes this spontaneity explicit. Such a writer would mark the freeing

projection of the “I” that happens within all writing through expressing this freeing projection within an act of writing. This formulation, however, holds yet another question: “Is Emerson a philosopher?” Philosophy makes explicit the implicit self-consciousness within human activity, so all philosophers, to a greater or lesser extent, are “self-conscious writers of spontaneity.” If we take this making explicit of self-consciousness as a genre-defining feature of philosophy, then all “writers of spontaneity” philosophize through their writing. Does, however, the activity of philosophizing exhaust the possibilities for the making explicit of self-consciousness within the deployment of human language? Could there be other genres or, at least, other linguistic practices through which this making explicit might take place?

Poets, for our prime example, are highly “self-conscious” concerning the language that they use within their writing. Might we reframe the question “Is Emerson a writer of spontaneity?” as “Is Emerson a poet of spontaneity?” This juxtaposition invokes the age-old question: “What is the relation between poetry and philosophy?” Philosophy, through its self-consciousness, manifests itself as an activity in perpetual opposition to the sensible: philosophy as the (self-conscious) explication of self-consciousness is intelligible activity. Poetry has often been understood as an artistic genre wherein the complications of “real-life” are sensibly reproduced, through metaphor, simile, and other twists of phrase. On the surface, it appears that an unbreachable divide separates the two genres. In the terms of our initial question, given this superficial understanding of poetry, as a writer of spontaneity (to the extent he is one), Emerson would have to be a philosopher of

spontaneity (or merely “a philosopher”), since there are no poets of spontaneity, other than the implicit, innocuous variety. Is, however, there no difference between the ordinary implicit self-consciousness within everyday language and the “self-conscious” writing of poetry within which we find language meticulously attending to its own unfolding? We can also ask, “To what extent is poetry, at a deeper level, related to philosophy in its self-conscious activity?” or even, “To what extent is philosophy, in its careful making explicit of self-consciousness, already related to poetic activity?”

In this essay, I will not attempt to formulate general answers to these deeper questions. I pose them to demarcate a horizon for investigating the initial question: “Is Emerson a writer of spontaneity?” I must remark, however, that there could be no general answers to these deeper questions, insofar as there are no such things as philosophy in general and poetry in general. This does not mean that philosophy does not essentially deal with the intelligible and poetry does not essentially deal with the sensible. This does not mean that this genre division makes no sense whatsoever or that we should immediately complicate or even jettison it. My statement, rather, implies that philosophy and poetry only take place in concrete instantiations during determinate historical periods. Philosophy, for instance, does not carry out its activity of the making explicit self-consciousness “just so,” with no prompting whatsoever. It is not as if someone, even Socrates or Augustine or Descartes, strolled out one day and proclaimed, “We need to make explicit intelligible activity within the world!” The making explicit within philosophy not

only uncovers the self-consciousness within ordinary language, but it also is always already provoked by local formations within that ordinary language which distort even its implicit self-conscious understanding.

For instance, we find Plato structuring his narration of (many of) Socrates's dialogues as a series of interrogating responses to the Sophists, particularly regarding their denial of the stable functioning of such terms as "better" or "worse" within human life. Or we find Augustine in his *Confessions* responding to Manichean distortions of the spiritual that divide people and things into simplistic categories of "the good" and "the evil." Or we find Descartes in his *Meditations* responding to methodological skepticism, a necessary tool for the practice of scientific inquiry, in its capacity to inculcate doubt concerning the existence of external beings. We encounter philosophy, within its generic discipline, always in the process of turning away from concrete misconstruals of the truth(s) of the soul and back towards an explicit self-consciousness of this soul and its necessary relations. If there were a poetry of spontaneity, then we can suppose this poetry would have to be similarly responsive to distortion within human life, since the writing of spontaneity, in any form, explicates self-consciousness in the advent of its occlusion.

During the late eighteenth through at least the mid-nineteenth centuries, a key misconstrual of the truth(s) of the soul took the form of empiricism. Kant famously announced that he was awakened from his dogmatic slumber by Hume's empiricism. Since this empiricism represented the totality of human experience in

terms of the (interpretive) association of impressions and ideas, it left no room for any objective (non-associative/non-interpretive) relation to any object whatsoever, whether that object was the material world beyond the particular sensation of it, the soul itself beyond its particular self-representation, or God beyond His place in a particular theological narrative. Importantly, for Kant and the other German idealists, this intellectual destruction of the possibility of objectivity had real consequences: it threatened objectivity in the natural sciences, the possibility of real knowledge of the human mind, and the stability of any foundation for moral judgment. The movement towards the explication of self-consciousness as the foundation for the possibility of objective judgment within German idealism was provoked, to be sure, by the theoretical incoherence within Hume's work, but more importantly, it was provoked by empiricism's threat towards the ordinary certainties through which human beings operatively engage their experience: the common-sense-certainty of the self, the world, and God.

A "chicken or egg" question, however, rests beneath this initial provocation: Was empiricism's fragmentation of the soul, the world, and the theological/moral realm into particularized associative interpretations a cause of such phenomena as a tendency towards increased mechanization of human relations, social skepticism regarding the natural sciences, and discord within theological/moral institutions, or was, to the contrary, empiricism itself merely the intellectual epiphenomenon of these real, underlying processes? As with all such questions, this one is unanswerable because both of its poles are hermeneutically interdependent. Social

processes shape intellectual reflection and intellectual reflection shapes social processes. The concrete provocations (misconstruals, distortions) to which philosophy inevitably responds are (*qua* concrete) never purely intellectual: since they have their effects within and from ordinary language (and the self-conscious individuals who speak it), they are always bi-laterally embedded within a historical form of life. Despite its status as unanswerable, however, this question of empiricism's fragmentation provides another horizontal line for our assessment of Emerson's engagement with self-consciousness as a writer of spontaneity.

In the introduction to Rödl's idealism below, we find Rödl interpreting Marx (in his "Theses on Feuerbach") as implicitly responding to empiricism. Although Marx presents himself as critiquing idealism as intellectual contemplation, this contemplation shares the template of empiricism, as defined by Rödl: the passive reception of the idea as opposed to its active engagement by the (*a priori* materialized) subject. This is not the venue to assess the correctness of Rödl's reading of Marx. Instead, however, we can ask a more general question: "In the modern age, can philosophy only be carried out as a response to empiricism?" Assuming the affirmative answer, then insofar as he was a philosopher, even though he predominately focused on socio-political material concerns, Marx had to have empiricism in his sights, and he implicitly aligned himself with the idealists in this fight, however reluctantly. Rödl believes that empiricism poses the principal philosophical problem not only for modern philosophy but for us today. Thus, he holds that the concerns of the German idealists who were directly responding to this

problem are also our concerns, because the problem has never left us, even if it has mutated into other forms than those which they encountered. Rödl attempts to resurrect idealism in an analytic form because he believes that the idealist strategies of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel (and Marx as an unwilling idealist) are still crucial for us to address this problem today.

The questions of whether this is so and to what extent it holds true are beyond the scope of this essay. Their pressing power, however, indicates the pervasiveness (extendedness in geographical space, historical time, and structural determination) of the problem of empiricism. Noting this power, we can naturally ask, “Was Emerson, as a writer of spontaneity, responding to empiricism?” We know that Emerson identified, to some extent, as a transcendental idealist, and he so identified in a particularly strong manner in his early works such as *Nature* and “The Transcendentalist.” In thinking about Emerson as a writer of spontaneity, however, these self-identifications are only slightly helpful. If writing of spontaneity directly involves the active making-explicit of self-consciousness as a response to empiricism, then this activity in no way necessitates proclamations that one is an idealist or that one is opposed to empiricism. To be sure, any and all transcendental (or absolute) idealists are writers of spontaneity, and such idealists write from the provocation of empiricism, but they cannot be legitimately said to do so merely on the basis of professions and denials or on their historical inclusion within or exclusion from various schools identified with idealism. As we will see in the following explication of Rödl, the writing of spontaneity involves the formal

engagement with the “I” in the making explicit of the projection of self-consciousness. Even though other idealists such as Kant or Hegel do not write as Rödl writes (they do not formalize and make explicit in the same manner), the formal articulation of their writing (insofar as they are idealists) determines their thought, not the thetic content of their prose or the thematics with which they are associated. If Emerson is a writer of spontaneity responding to empiricism, therefore, we should be able to discover this *within* his writing rather than based on his placement in relation to labels or schools or even in relation to his (purported) professed doctrines. Such placements, in fact, are usually made within the sway of empiricism, and therefore, we would be better off taking them as provocations for the engagement with spontaneity rather than critical assessments.

In what follows, I will give ample time for concrete discussion concerning such misconstruals, but here, I must emphasize this formal point. Suppose, for instance, someone objected to my claims above in the following manner: “But do not historical influences matter? It is well and good that we must engage Emerson as a ‘writer of spontaneity,’ but to understand him, we must place him within a historical context. You, yourself, place Rödl, for instance, in relation to Kant. Positioning Emerson’s work within a historical (thematic, doctrinal) succession is necessary and certainly does not amount to ‘an empiricist misconstrual.’” There is no denying that in making explicit of self-consciousness within language, one indeed starts with language, and all language, whether recorded in past tomes or spoken improvisationally in the moment is marked and remarked through and through by

history and context. Any linguistic artifact or event can be endlessly investigated and situated and have its origins traced. A primary means through which we engage with texts as objects (where live speech is also a text) is to read/hear them through associating them with other texts or events, inquiring into the biography of the author, and understanding them on anthropological, economic, or political horizons. Insofar as the writing of spontaneity involves the making explicit of self-consciousness in language and/as life, without the historical being of language, there would be nothing to make explicit. As Rödl argues (along with Kant and Hegel in their various ways), idealism is always already simultaneously materialism, which means it holds the subject to be always already materialized. The “movement of self-consciousness” always already happens within a history, and this history can be analyzed (or even changed) along any number of dimensions. Even situating the problem of the distortion our relation to spontaneity through appeal to empiricism is a “historical move,” appealing to the name of a historical genre in order to demarcate the procession of a practice. Ultimately, the opacity of ordinary language to itself resides within the articulation of its historical being, so the very work of making explicit requires the non-formalized inheritance of self-conscious implication: without fossilized metaphors, we would have no truths to uncover.

Thus, we can explore how Emerson’s ideas of individuality and freedom resonate or fail to resonate with the freeing within the prior revolution of independence or the upcoming one of emancipation. We can track Emerson’s

relation to the historicizing movements within German theology (and the resistance to this historicization through writers such as Schleiermacher) contributed to the formation of his ideas concerning the divine. We can investigate the extent to which Emerson's understanding of idealism itself was distilled from the accounts of commentators such as Carlyle or Victor Cousin. Such questions place Emerson's texts as historical documents within the limbs of their formative genealogy. And yet, we can also ask whether any of these analyses touch that aspect of Emerson's work that would make it into a writing of spontaneity. In Marx's sense (though it is a sense he may resist) of "sensuous human activity," the writing of spontaneity is sensuous human activity and even communal sensuous human activity, and as such, we can only engage, practice ourselves, extend, complicate, or even write in opposition to it in order for it to remain what it is.

Even if we attempt to trace a lineage of influence from one writer of spontaneity to another, for instance from Hegel to Rödl or from Kant to Emerson, we could not do so, if we treated these as writers of spontaneity, without concretely engaging the articulation of subjectivity within their work, but in so doing, we would no longer involve ourselves in "tracing a lineage." Instead, we would find ourselves within a transhistorical conversation involving differing concrete engagements within the space of reasons, and, therefore, we would concordantly find ourselves mediating debates, responding for and against claims, translating statements, improving each other's arguments, and sharing in ends. Our noticing of historical differences and similarities would occur as a residuum of this

engagement, not its cause. We would have to encounter the thinkers in this conversation from on the basis of their own thoughts, as we come to encounter the entire conversation as *ours*. The work of history in this situation would resemble the search for a reference on a cell phone to facilitate a dinner conversation, with its appropriateness as rigorously cordoned, rather than resembling a terminus of comprehension.

The empiricist will not understand this. She will either believe that Emerson's texts carry with them a hidden meaning, a meaning that we must glean through historical-textual insight, or else, more probably, she will think that historical-textual insight is all we have: when we have contextualized and historicized enough to suit ourselves, then this produced contextual-historical narrative will represent all the meaning the text has or ever has had. She will view it as a nodal point within the dynamics of power, as a repository of affect, as a fossil of the history of trauma, or as an emblem of identity. She will make no sense of the imperative to "engage the text in the present." She will not understand the call to encounter the text not merely as an artifact to be interpreted and not even merely as an assemblage of acts and judgments. The latter would supplant the former through allowing the operative articulation of the "I" to show itself working in and through the text, an "I" that engages, carries, and extends a projective space of reasons. Even if we stopped there, this encounter would be an improvement over empiricist historicization, insofar as it would give the text a voice, beyond that of the neutral(ized), perpetually displaced "author." But the call to engage Emerson's

text in its spontaneity, *a priori* necessary for encountering him as a writer of spontaneity, could not cease at this point. Not only would we have to encounter his texts through the dimensions of act and judgment, we would also have to make explicit the speaking to a you across time, the ministerial address to an already responsive congregation, the transcending moment that would hold the past and the present together in the futural projection of perfection. Such a freeing moment, implicit within any linguistic interaction, distant or near in time or space, the genius of ordinary communication, would remain opaquely unexplicated from the passively receptive vantage of the empiricist, even as she actively reconstructs her impressions in her own image. For her, the text will only appear as external and bygone, hostage to the narration of its productive history.

D. Overview

The reader can expect the following in the two main chapters of this dissertation:

1. In the second chapter, “The Idealism of Sebastian Rödl,” I interpret Rödl’s work with an eye towards its resonance with Emerson’s idealist poetics. In this interpretation, I will attempt to initiate the reader into Rödl’s characteristic patterns of thought. I will not summarize the results of his work, but I will rather interweave moments of citation, application, and emulation in order to show how his thought works from the inside. This will be necessary because in the following chapter on Emerson, I will be using these characteristic patterns of Rödl’s thought in order to help me elucidate

the functioning of Emerson's poetics. This means that I will not be interested in saying that this or that idea in Emerson resembles this or that idea in Rödler, but I will rather be interested in disclosing their underlying structural resonance. Although I will mention the work of Rödler in various places in the Emerson chapter, as situating reminders, these mentions will not be doing most of the work. Rödler's idealism, and particularly his thoughts of the subject and of infinite ends and objects, should be heard as sounding beneath the surface of the entire chapter. Thus, even though the issues discussed in the Rödler chapter may appear overly analytical and non-Emersonian at times, the reader is advised to have patience, since the thought within this chapter will inform what follows as a whole.

2. In the third chapter, "Emerson's Idealist Poetics," I use two interlocked framing strategies in order to interpret Emerson's work. First, I perform a microscopically close reading of the first two chapters of Emerson's *Nature* as a frame for the entire dissertation chapter. Within this frame, I move within and without Emerson's corpus, providing readings of latter sections of *Nature* as well as many of Emerson's other essays and works, but all of my readings take place in service of elucidating the primary interpretative frame. I do this because I am interested in following the characteristic patterns of Emerson's poetic thought, his idealist poetics, and in order to do this, I have to follow him thinking, just as I followed Rödler thinking in the previous section. With a dense writer such as Emerson, this sort of following is

impossible through the mere juxtaposition of distant passages. By interweaving discussion of others works from Emerson's oeuvre, along with reference to historical and secondary sources, however, I will show how this thought extends beyond the narrow confines within which I elucidate it. Second, in the final section of this chapter, F., I perform an even more microscopic reading of the sections preceding and following Emerson's "transparent eyeball" passage. Although this section is an extension of the work of the preceding sections, it is also meant to show how the thought of idealism, poetically articulated, can inform the meditative reading of the Emersonian text. Although this section ends the chapter, it is not a conclusion, since there is no conclusion to be reached within such meditative reading.

Chapter 2. The Idealism of Sebastian Rödl

A. Introduction to Rödl's Approach

This is not a proper introduction to the thought of Sebastian Rödl. In one sense, it is not proper because I will only focus on and explicate those aspects of Rödl's idealism relevant to our encounter with Emerson. In a more important sense, however, it cannot be proper, just as no introduction to philosophers who transform our relation to language as a function of their thinking (such as Hegel or Wittgenstein) could be proper. The thought of these philosophers is bound together with its concretely worked-out form within their writing, and the only way to adequately understand them is to go "the bloody hard way," to use Wittgenstein's phrase, and follow their dense prose and work through the articulations of their thought. Literary theory often draws theses or conclusions from philosophical texts where there are none, at least none that can be extracted from a path of thinking. To some extent, such extraction is unavoidable when soliciting thoughtful works for assistance in interpretive ventures, but the loss of thinking in extraction can be marked and minimized, and I will attempt to do this here.¹

1. One way I will try to minimize this loss is to avoid stating, as much as possible, what Rödl thinks independently from showing how he thinks it. I will do this through explaining key concepts by presenting them within micro-encapsulations of characteristic patterns of his thought: miniature inferential chains. Sometimes I will use the examples and figures he deploys to populate the world of his reasoning, and sometimes, if they promote the necessary brevity and condensation required here, I will invent my own. As well, instead of always presenting these illustrations accompanied by the customary "Rödl believes" or "Rödl concludes," I will sometimes translate my distilling explication into the first person, allowing the reader to follow more easily the movements of thought that

Idealism as a philosophical enterprise investigates ideas (concepts, representations) and their synthesis within experience in order to understand the production and ordering of those ideas by the human mind, as well as to understand that mind itself.² First person consciousness provides the most immediate access to the experience to be analyzed and the mind that produces it. Therefore, supposing I am an idealist, I attempt to understand *my* mind through investigating its final product, *my* experience, by analyzing that experience to reveal its infrastructural synthesis of ideas. In coming to know more about my ideas and their synthesis, I come to know more about myself. Unlike Platonic or Berkeleyan idealism, Rödl's is a philosophy of self-consciousness: there is no metaphysical speculation on ideas in the mind of God or Ideas inhabiting an intelligible realm of immutable souls. Many critics often associate idealism with the thesis that the mind creates the world that it knows, and the self, in knowing itself, knows the most basic things about the

necessarily involve the first-person perspective. I will act as if I am Rödl writing. Thus, as well, when I quote Rödl in context, his usage of the first person will sometimes quite naturally pass over into mine, in resonance with both of our aims to draw the reader into the first-personal thought of spontaneity.

2. This is true of the classical German idealists Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, in differing ways, and it is also true for Rödl. For Rödl, his innovation involves understanding ideas originally based on their linguistic articulation within the movement of reasoning. Rödl writes within the classical analytic tradition whose implied dictum is "All philosophy is the philosophy of language" (which is also an implied imperative: "Let us make all philosophy into the philosophy of language!").

world, since the world is nothing other than the subject's experience of it as a constellation of ideas.³

Rödl's first and primary question concerns the possibility of first-person knowledge. By first-person knowledge, I do not mean merely knowledge about myself as a singular person with a singular perspective, because this is too unclear. Do I, for instance, want to know about my uniqueness as a living being, my history leading up to the present moment in my life, my social role as an individual among others, or my singular perceptual vantage on the world? As an idealist, I may want to know such things about "the first person," if it is defined in such a way to include these phenomena in it. But first, as an *idealist*, I want to know about my unique being insofar as it produces and orders ideas. As an idealist, I understand this production and ordering as thinking. Thus, as an idealist, I seek to know my being as a thinking subject.

But how can I do this? I can think (produce and order ideas) and then attempt to know what I do and what I am when I think. But knowing is a mode of thinking, so in order to know myself as a thinking subject, I initially must be able to

3. I will discuss this cosmological expansiveness in the final section of this essay (on materialism and idealism in general) but exploring this part of idealism first will not be helpful. Unless we first define words (ideas) such as "self," "mind," "idea," and "know" in idealist terms, any account of idealism as a cosmic ontology would be vague tending towards vacuous. For now, I should apprise the reader that Rödl's idealism relies on an account of the underlying being of neither the self nor the world as substantial in any transcendently metaphysical sense. For him, idealism operates compatibly with a thoroughgoing non-metaphysical materialism.

produce thought concerning thought.⁴ For Rödl, this self-reference is primarily what must be explained to answer the question about the possibility of first-person knowledge. Self-reference (as the original basis for self-knowledge), however, is not a species of the much maligned “self-presence.” In order to refer to myself and, hence, know myself, I neither do this through using the senses nor through some internal process resembling receptive-sensory affection, whereby I mysteriously “make myself present to myself.”

According to Rödl,

Unmediated first-person thoughts articulate knowledge I possess, not by perceiving, but by being their object. If I know without mediation that I am F, then I know it, not by perceiving that I am F, but by being F. (*Self-Consciousness*, 9)⁵

Two pressing questions arise here, first regarding reference and then regarding knowledge: “How does being an object enable me to refer to it?” (*SC*, 9) and “How does being an object put me in a position to know how things stand with it?” (*SC*, 9). Usually, we think about referring to an object in a mediated sense as dictated by a

4. When I say, “I think” and I attempt to know this I who is thinking, then I must do more of the same: I must think about an I that is thinking. I must produce second order thoughts that reference first order thoughts. To know myself as a thinking subject, I must be able to refer to my thinking. But in creating both the first and second order thoughts, there is an I that is doing the thinking, and self-knowledge aims at knowing this I. So not only must thinking be able to refer to itself in a second order sense, it also must be able to refer to that which produces it in either sense.

5. In Rödl’s text, oftentimes the terms “self-conscious” and “self-consciousness” are not hyphenated. Throughout this text, including the quotes from Rödl’s texts, I hyphenate the term in order to maintain stylistic consistency.

relation of “aboutness.” The word “Mars” refers to the planet Mars through being about the planet Mars. This “about” signifies that I have an external relation to what I refer to.⁶ “Aboutness” is like an arrow directed towards the object, an arrow whose “targeting” is afforded by some pre-access to the object that allows for the aim. Knowledge about factual states of affairs (“how things stand”) presupposes reference. If I know the moon is rock-strewn, then this knowledge is made possible through my ability to refer externally to the moon and its rocks, so that I can construct a knowing representation of their standing relationship in referential space.

“Aboutness” seems to dictate that I *receive* information about the object beforehand (characteristically through the senses), and so it seems to necessitate an externalist (the object must be external to my mind), receptive (I must receive information about the object across the mediating external distance between me and it) theory of reference in order to account for my ability to transform receptive acquisition into referential targeting. Such a theory, when reference is construed in this way, seem necessary and sufficient to account for all cases of reference. In a receptive-externalist-based mindset,⁷ it seems impossible that I could either refer to

6. Saul Kripke, for instance, puts forth a causal theory of reference in *Naming and Necessity* (Lecture II), whereby this relation of aboutness is established through external, material causation: the moon causes the light to bend thus and so which causes impressions on my retinas which are linked to my utterance of the word “moon” and, therefore, I can talk about the moon through tracing the reference of my word back along a material, causal chain.

7. This is also an empiricist or materialist mindset, since empiricism and materialism both require commitment to the priority of the senses. (There is no

or know anything whatsoever through *being* that thing, which would directly imply that immediate reference and knowledge are themselves impossible.⁸ Rödl, however, directly states that such reference and knowledge are possible. He designates “knowledge associated with first person reference ‘knowledge from the inside’” (SC 9). For him, it is a provisional methodological designation to say that I have knowledge from the inside, since usually, if I claim to have “knowledge from the inside” (of my own body, for instance), then this knowledge still requires sensory apprehension and, thus, is not immediate.

If I say “My stomach hurts,” I do this through my inner capacity to sense my body’s states, and like every sensory claim, this one is not immediate, and it could be mistaken (it might be my appendix and not my stomach that hurts). When I say, “My stomach hurts” and claim to refer to my stomach, I do this only through neuro-intra-corporeal location (the targeting), but my inner neural pathways (or the interpretation of their signals) might be crossed. This “inside” (the inside of a body state) is not interior enough for self-knowledge. All sensory-affective claims, from “I see Mars” to “My foot hurts” and even to “I feel sad” are not “interior” enough to express reference through being.

such thing as an intellectual materialism, since if an intellect had to posit the existence of matter independently of its revelation through the senses, then that intellect would be prior to both that matter and those senses, and one would no longer be a materialist but rather, perhaps, an incoherent dualist.

8. My utterances could not be about the moon by referring to the moon, to use the example of Kripke’s causal theory of reference (as a paradigmatic externalist mindset), unless that moon is external to my utterance and connected to that utterance through some affective (in Kripke’s case, material-causal) relationship.

According to Rödl, however, implicit within every one of my references to anything outside, I also refer to myself, because I must express myself as so: “I see Mars.” Sensory claims depend on reference to this deeper “inside” (the deep I referring to itself through being itself) in order to be put forth at all. I can show this through drawing attention to the fact that in all such claims (in all claims *tout court*), a prefatory “I think” is always already implied: “I think: my stomach hurts” or “I think: I see Mars” or “I think: I feel sad.” (If the reader believes that sadness as affect might be immediately known, then she should remember the possibility of the response, “No you don’t feel sad, you’re just tired,” where I might have mistaken my fatigue for emotional despondence.)⁹ Likewise, if I declare neutrally, “Mars is in space,” it is implied, “I think: Mars is in space.” There is no avoiding the mystery of immediate self-reference through escaping into the third person.

All mediated sensory claims presuppose immediate self-reference, whether this self-reference is explicitly indicated within those claims or not. This self-reference, the reference of the “I” in the “I think” (whereby I refer to myself through being what I am) is the strange target we are pursuing. But if this immediate

9. According to Rödl, “Reflection on the nature of sensation cannot reveal how it is that sensation is represented in first person thought, because sensation is present in animals that are not self-conscious” (*SC*, 11). This will be controversial to some, although it should not be, but for Rödl, as self-conscious individuals, we are not primarily animals. Animals, whatever they have, do not have subjectivity, because they do not have the capacity to know themselves through being themselves. Animals do not have self-consciousness because they do not have language. Human beings, having language, (where all language use implies the happening of self-consciousness) are not primarily animals.

“reference through being” does not happen through perceptual (sensory, affective, empirical, external) knowledge, then how does it happen? Rödl claims,

First person knowledge does not rest on observation, for perceptual knowledge is of something as other and involves a demonstrative reference to its object. We shall argue that first person knowledge of action and belief springs from reasoning about what to do and believe. So this is our account of the kind of knowledge that sustains the “I”-reference in thought about thought: it is knowledge from reflection. What action and belief, the will and the intellect, have in common, in virtue of which both are thought, is this form of knowledge: self-consciousness (*SC*, 13).

The most important phrase from Rödl in this passage is “first person knowledge of action and belief springs from reasoning about what to do and believe.” If this is true, then my “being” (which allows me to refer to myself and, thus, know myself self-consciously) is not timeless “in-itself” being, a “state of being-itself,” such as a stone might be attributed within a non-temporal snapshot of its existence. Rather, this being “takes place” just as “reasoning about what to do and believe.” (For Rödl, the being of the “I” is tied up within “a happening” of reasoning, though this happening is not a process: more on this later.) In reasoning about what to do and believe, I refer to myself immediately and know myself self-consciously, prior to any sensory or receptive knowledge. One might ask: “But does not one have to be already self-conscious (to have conscious awareness, at least) in order to be able to reason?” Does not my capacity to give and ask for reasons and draw inferences not presuppose my self-consciousness rather than allow it to spring forth? Furthermore, if my self-conscious being happens as reasoning without reception, then does not this being float away into the metaphysical realm of the

Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum*? If I am a being not primarily determined by my relation to (material) affectivity, then is it not the case that I am an immaterial being, a soul, and that Rödl's philosophy is an antiquated philosophy of ghosts?

For Rödl, these questions rest on misunderstandings of basic human relationships to self and world. To show this, we need to demonstrate that A) the self-reference that manifests in the self-knowledge of self-consciousness arises from the occurrence of human reasoning, B) this arising precedes rather than presupposes what we call "conscious-self-awareness," and C) such a wonderful thing as self-consciousness occurs in the material world and does not require a spectral, metaphysical realm. In order to carry out these demonstrations, after discussion of some 1) preliminary methodological issues, we need to elucidate the nature of this reasoning as it happens along 2) practical, 3) theoretical, 4) material and ideal axes. Doing the above will reveal that human self-consciousness is what is primarily known in any experiential encounter with self or world and that, therefore, idealism's aims and conclusions are true.

B. Preliminary Methodological Issues

Certain forms of reference must be understood in terms of ways of knowing how things stand with the object, acts of which are unmediated thoughts involving the relevant form of reference. This applies to first person reference, and it is clear how to characterize in the abstract ways of knowing that sustain it: I know in a first person way that an object is F by being that object, i.e., by being F if and only if I know that someone is F in a way that satisfies this formula, I know without mediation that I am F. (SC, 17)

When he writes, Rödl uses a subtle technique of style involving verbs. This technique is not just a rhetorical flourish but rather signifies a fact about all verbs,

a fact that we normally overlook when we use verbs and gerundial forms.¹⁰ In order to expose this trick, say to yourself the following sentences: “I know there is an apple on the table.” “I am here in the room.” “I walk to school.” Now, say those same sentences with the following difference: stretch out the verbs as if you were trying to get someone to pay special notice to them, perhaps because this person is hard of hearing or does not understand the language fully. “I ‘knooooooowwww’ there ‘iiisssss’ an apple on the table.” “I ‘aaaaaaammmmmm’ here in the room.” “I ‘waaalllllk’ to school.” What should be realized through these stretched articulations is the fact that “knowing,” “being,” and “walking” are not instantaneous, non-temporal events: they take time, even though their verbal presentation within the first person present does not draw our attention to this and, perhaps, even disguises it. In these second instances, we might say, the verbs have been “temporalized.” In their usage, the fact that they all implicitly operate through predicating (or, we might say, “oppperrraate’ through ‘predddicaatinnng”) temporally becomes explicitly marked. We would be quickly annoyed if someone wrote this way for an extended period, even if she were merely trying to remind us of something we might miss.¹¹ Fortunately, Rödl does not write

10. Wittgenstein: “We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view, one out of many possible orders; not the order. To this end we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook” (*PI* 132).

11. Heidegger’s often uses middle-voiced neologisms to indicate such temporality, and some people find them annoying, while others find them true and beautiful. Perhaps, in some cases, finding such distortions of language annoying

this way. Nor will I, but to accentuate how certain verbs are to be heard in this discussion, I will now rephrase the relevant verbs (and gerundial derivatives, to which this trick also applies) in the first part of Rödl's second sentence quoted above: "it is clear how to characterize in the abstract ways of 'knooooooooowwinnng' that 'suuustaaainnn' it [first person 'refferrrennnce']: I 'knoooooooooww' in a first person way that an object 'iiiiissss' F by 'beeeeeinnng' that object." As well, I will place a # next to verbs or gerundial words where I want to especially emphasize their temporal character, although I would have to do it all the time when I write about Rödl, if relevance were the only criterion.

For the empiricist,¹² there are two paths to solving the Sphinx riddle of self-knowledge. In the first case, if I (the empiricist) have receptive knowledge of myself, if I KNOW myself, then this knowledge must intrinsically involve information received across an external gap (through the very meaning of "receptive"). Normally, such crossing and receiving of information takes time. If I perceive my corgi, Woogie, sitting one meter away from me, my knowledge about the state of Woogie is at least 3×10^{-8} seconds old (the time it takes light to travel one meter), not counting the time from retinal reception to conscious awareness. Suppose poor Woogie were suddenly transported to Mars, and I watched him appear

does not merely amount to grammatical obsessiveness but rather indicates a certain relationship to time, one of avoiding its acknowledgement.

12. This is Rödl's designation for anyone that approaches knowledge in a receptive/affective mindset (on the basis of a receptive/affective epistemological theory, whether the holder of that theory is a self-professed empiricist or a first-order materialist (anti-idealist) or one who believes in intellectual intuitions).

there through an advanced telescope. If I only received an image of him in the first second after he arrived, before he started to succumb to the cold and the oxygen deprivation, then I might say that I know Woogie is alive on Mars. Unfortunately, however, it takes light 14 minutes to reach the earth from Mars, so when I received this initial image, Woogie would have already perished, and I should have been sad, as if looking at a photograph of someone dead. I did not know Woogie was still alive: I only believed I knew.

Supposing the mind is the brain in process (a process involving very fast neuro-electrical activity), then that mind's "knowing itself"—representing what state it is in—would not be immediate self-knowledge, but that knowledge would be exactly as old as it took the sampling representation to form through the cascading of neural impulses. Although I cannot imagine myself in the present as alive representing my dead self in the past, as in the Woogie case (and why is this?), in fact, on this empiricist account, I might be an entirely different "self" representing the being of a past self that I had succeeded. Suppose, for instance, that it took 14 minutes for a sampling representation to form, but I underwent a horrific trauma in the interval. Through what criterion of mediated, receptive knowledge could I claim that I know that I am the same thinking, experiencing subject? Suppose this sampling takes 5ms. Would the shorter time make any difference? Speculating that there could be a mediated form of self-consciousness knowledge seems to involve a category mistake, so problems inherent to this supposition cannot be solved through the pragmatic shortening of temporal intervals.

Fortunately, however, our criterion for self-knowledge, *ex hypothesi*, is temporally IMMEDIATE self-knowledge, not mediated knowledge of the self in the past. If we equate self-knowledge with self-consciousness, this hypothetical criterion follows. In self-consciousness, I would presumably know that I am a conscious self at this very instant, not that I was a conscious self at thus and such time. Therefore, in this first scenario, as an empiricist who believes self-knowledge as self-consciousness is possible, even via reception, I would have to postulate some non-temporal form of information transmission, which seems self-contradictory in its formulation. In order to understand self-consciousness in this manner, I would have to believe in a very non-empirical miracle. Somehow, a consciousness immediately in-itself would have to “get” information about itself in a receptive manner that would involve no temporal mediation. The necessity of this immediacy is implied by the very idea of instantaneous self-knowledge.

Receiving information involves externality. I can only have an external relation to myself through representing my being in the past, “my past self.” Thus, in order to “know myself” in this way, I would have to represent my past self in a way that takes no time whatsoever (otherwise who I am might have changed, even in the course of producing this representation) and then have some miraculous manner of recognizing that this representation is identical to who I am now. (But if I know who I am now in order to make this comparison, then why did I undertake the task of memory to begin with?) Remember, this empiricist still believes in self-knowledge, not in probability of self-identity, so we cannot solve her problems

through gerrymandering the meaning of “to know.” Verbs such as “get” and “know” would have to be used by her as if thought took no time at all. To take the example of knowing Woogie is on Mars to illustrate how these non-temporal verbs would have to be deployed in a “real-world” case, if I immediately and receptively said, “I see Woogie alive on Mars through the telescope,” and I actually knew that what I saw was true in the immediate present, then this “see” would have to involve some sort of transcendent vision, whose metaphysical light does not take time to travel from thing to eye to mind.

Those who follow the second course, the path most travelled by empiricists, deny the existence of a self and of genuine self-knowledge, because any represented state of the self would have to be retroactively constructed in a model or narrative. These empiricists bite the bullet and acknowledge that epistemological verbs and the information transfer that funds them take time, and they, therefore, reasonably conclude that there is no self-consciousness. Every bit of knowledge about myself is the same as a third person account, since it is about the “he” who was and not about the “me” that I am. This predicament implies that “knowing myself” means creating a narrative about my past, not something that ever overlaps with the occluded present. These empiricists, therefore, could readily agree to the working of temporalized verbs in Rödl’s account (although they would understand them differently than Rödl would), but they would do so at the cost of denying the very

sense of the reality or pursuit of “actual” self-consciousness.¹³ They would deny the validity of Rödl’s inquiry entirely, not merely offer an alternative answer to his.

According to the idealist, on the contrary, I can immediately know myself (and thus refer to myself) as a being in time just and only through being# myself.¹⁴

Here is an introductory statement of the issue from Rödl:

What I know receptively is not the same reality as my receptive knowledge of it. It is an independent object, which must be given to me and which I must receive. By contrast, my spontaneous knowledge and what I thus know are one reality. When I know an object through spontaneity, the idea of the object’s affecting me, and being taken in by me, does not apply. There is no room in this case for something that connects me with the object and through which I know it. (SC, 13-14)

As we can quickly see, Rödl contrasts primary knowledge from receptivity (empiricism) with primary knowledge from spontaneity. The entire enigma we are dealing with in this introduction to Rödl (for the purposes of reading Emerson) is to

13. Or, as a “third” alternative (although it is really only a semantic variant of the second one), the empiricist ascribes non-temporal self-knowledge to a fictional subject as a function of an ongoing “self-narrative,” and then she refers to this narrative as “the actual self.” This means, functionally, that for her “I am here” and “my fictional self-narrative is here,” although they have different Fregean sense, would have the same referent, with the “I” having an imprecise sense (like “the morning star” for the peasant) and “my fictional self-narrative” having a more precise one (like “the planet Venus” for the scientist). It is not surprising that empiricists in the philosophy of mind sometimes believe that our ordinary mental language (including words like “I” and “self” and “you”) amounts to a “folk psychology,”-might be replaced with one omitting such subjectivist terms. Perhaps, communication after such an elimination would involve exchanging neural diagrams.

14. One of the things that Heidegger, writing in the idealist tradition (as defined here), means when he delivers pronouncements of the form, “The being# of Dasein does not have the character of a being” is that one must switch temporal gears when one is thinking about the subject (although for Heidegger, Dasein is not exactly a subject).

account for what knowledge from spontaneity is, how it is possible, and how this spontaneity comes to be articulated in language. Supposing such self-consciousness exists, though, the reader should be immediately able to see that it avoids both the mystery and the denial of self-knowledge that the empiricist must choose between in one deft move. With emphases, the middle sentence from above would be inscribed so: “By contrast, my spontaneous knowledge# and what I thus know# are# one reality. When I know# an object through spontaneity, the idea of the object’s affecting me, and being taken in by me, does not apply.” I am not an eternal, static thing. Knowledge is not an eternal, static thing. To know myself would have to involve the temporality of the subject and the temporality of knowing. To have actual self-knowledge and not either metaphysical nonsense or self-denial disguised as self-knowledge, this knowledge would have to take place non-receptively, which is to say spontaneously, which is also to say immediately, but this immediacy would be temporal, something more like going over a waterfall than sitting by a lake.

We must also, however, note the following, even if it partially undoes the work of the similes at the end of the last paragraph. If I speak about the temporality of doing# or believing#, then I do not understand this doing# or believing# as a process. I watch an ice cube melt. This is a process that I know receptively through watching it. My body is getting older as I watch the ice cube melt. If I had a precise enough measurement device, it could chart the deterioration of my cells, and I would then know this deterioration receptively through indirectly observing it through its effects. I would see the process of aging. If I am cutting a

piece of cake, however, then this spontaneous action is something that is first and foremost done# by me, not receptively known by me. Even though I or any outside viewer could represent any action I carry out as a process, a changing of states over time, the time of the process is not the same as the time of the active subject (which is a pleonasm, since subjectivity is activity). In my present language, it would be “ungrammatical” or just plain wrong for me to write, “the butter melts#,” since the subjective temporality indicated would not apply, because butter melting is a process and not an action. The correct, snarky English professor response would be, “The butter melts what?”

Correspondingly, the “time” of these temporal verbs is neither objective-physical time nor involves the subjective experience of time. My doing# does not merely take place in time, as a process among processes, and my doing# is also not a process that I experience as mine through subjectively apprehending it from the interior of a consciousness. I might say, “I know# that it objectively took me twelve hours to write# that piece, but to me, it only seemed# like an hour,” indicating that I fully understand the difference between objective and subjective time. That know# or that write#, however, does not take place either in objective or subjective time, if I understand that knowing# and that writing# to involve the spontaneous self-consciousness of the subject. For now, though this must be explained and qualified, we can say that these acts of the subject take place in/as the time of

spontaneity—enactive time.¹⁵ The occurrence of enactive time can only be made explicit in the living through of the articulations of a subject. A subject only encounters enactive time in projects of self-knowledge.

C. Practical Self-Consciousness

Rödl approaches spontaneous self-knowledge first through giving an account of practical self-knowledge, the self-knowledge that I possess implicitly (and which can be made explicit in philosophical moments) in doing anything whatsoever as myself, which means the self-knowledge implicit in action. Rödl's placing his explanation of practical self-knowledge before his explanation of theoretical self-knowledge (unlike Kant, who chose theoretical knowledge first) is wise, given the emphasis on the importance of the temporal above, since we normally understand action as something that takes place in time, though Rödl will reveal it as temporal in another sense than the ordinary one.

Here is Rödl's conclusive statement concerning the essential link between practical knowledge and self-consciousness:

Knowing that one is doing A by reasoning about what to do and doing A intentionally are one reality. This is a character of the form of predication "I * do A": that subject and action-form are joined in this way includes the subject's representing them as so joined. The facts are not prior and dictate. They are not prior and cannot dictate, as they include and are included in the subject's knowledge of them. (*SC*, 62)¹⁶

15. Rödl does not use these phrases. Rödl's thinking of time is here implicit in his thinking of self-consciousness. I make this thinking explicit.

16. The "*" in this quote formally represents the joining of the subject (I) with the action-form (do A), indicating that the action is not independent from the subject's self-conscious knowledge.

We are seeking a way to establish the identity of the being of an I and its self-consciousness. If, *ex hypothesi*, I automatically know that I am doing something (and, therefore, thinking something, insofar as doing presupposes reasoning) when I do it, then merely by doing anything at all, I demonstrate the possibility of self-consciousness. In practice, I should reach my hand towards my coffee cup and Rödl's treatise would be unnecessary, since self-consciousness is not the result of a long and detailed argument. It happens all the time for every person. In theory, however, this self-conscious knowledge is not conceptually explicit. Philosophical reflection makes conceptually explicit what is implicit within human life and does nothing more than this. This making explicit of being/doing and self-consciousness is the establishment of the necessary identity, and in so doing (#), it removes confusion and self-misapprehension, but it does not give us new information about ourselves. In a similar manner to that of the so-called ordinary language philosophers, such as Wittgenstein and Austin, Rödl seeks to solve philosophical problems through recalling and analyzing ordinary deeds and words. In his work that treats many of the issues discussed here, but from the vantage of their relation to the field of epistemology, *Self-Consciousness and Objectivity: An Introduction to Absolute Idealism*, Rödl describes his method as follows:

. . . a curious character of the present essay: it propounds no theses, advances no hypotheses, does not recommend a view or position; it does not give arguments that are to support a view, it does not defend a position against competing ones, it does nothing to rule out contrary theses. It does nothing of the sort because it is—it brings to explicit consciousness—the self-consciousness of judgment. As it aims to express the comprehension of judgment that is contained in any judgment, the present essay can say only what anyone always already

knows, knows in any judgment, knows insofar as she judges at all. It cannot say anything that is novel, it can make no discovery, it cannot advance our knowledge in the least. Echoing Kant, we can say that its work is not that universal knowledge, but a formula of it. Its work is its language. Again, echoing Kant, we can say that this is no mean thing. In the formula we think clearly what we know; the formula shields us from confusion, which, being a confusion with respect to the knowledge in which and through which we are subjects of judgment, must do the most pervasive damage. (*SCIAI*, 12-13)

Here, we hear Rödl echoing not only Kant but also Heidegger (“always already”) and Wittgenstein, who made many similar sounding methodological claims during his career, such as “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it” (*PI*, 124) and “If one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them” (*PI*, 128). More similarly to Heidegger or less similarly to Wittgenstein here (but only a bit more or less), Rödl believes that the practice of philosophy results in certain formalizations: the work of philosophy leaves behind positive results. For our purposes here, this process of formalization is crucial, because it has the following implications. Suppose I analyze an action such as riding a bike (I will do this later). Per my project here, I will, through this formal analysis, make explicit the implicit self-consciousness that resides within this activity: I will remind us what we already know, since self-consciousness is self-knowledge, so riding a bike is not only a practical activity but also (implicitly) an epistemological one. My ability to do this “reminding” implies *the possibility of its formalization as containing self-conscious knowledge was already included in the activity of riding the bike*. There are different ways the implications of this insight

can be paraphrased. One is that “Riding a bike” is not (only) a series of discrete events (brakes pulls, foot moves, etc.), but rather, it is (or has) a form that we can bring to conceptual light. Another is that “Riding a bike” is not (only) a physical process but it is also a manifestation of intelligence in the world,” an incarnate brilliance that we can intelligently formulate in language. Yet another is that “Riding a bike” is an activity that carries not only my body with it but more importantly both sustains and is sustained by my subjectivity in its occurrence, and this mutual sustenance is also borne in the “I do A.” In order to establish his claims about the relative superfluity of philosophy and the existence of formal self-consciousness within activity, Rödl must show that we always already bear a knowing relation to intelligence within the world and this intelligence maintains us as we maintain it.

When I lived in Regensburg, Germany for three years, I rode my bike everywhere. I became very good at negotiating tight corners around narrow streets over bumpy cobblestone roads. I suppose it is an average day, and I plan to go to the grocery store to get sausages and bread and cheese for dinner. I get on my bike and start riding. When I am riding, I am performing an action. If someone puts me in a cart against my will and pushes me down a hill, the cart carries me down the hill, but there is no action involved. There is an intrinsic connection between my intending to do something (ride a bike) and my doing it that makes it into an action. Likewise, in any action there must be an I (“*my riding*”) that makes it possible. Finally, any action must aim at some end or set of ends. I am riding to the store to

get food and bring it back. The retrieval of food is my goal. Even if I just went out riding, without getting groceries, I would have been riding to get some air, riding for the enjoyment of riding, or riding for exercise. Suppose I wake up on the bike going downhill in a frightening case of somnambulant behavior. This would be terrifying because no intentionality would be involved. I would not know immediately what I was doing nor why. I would feel completely out of control. There would not have been an “I” that was doing this, not would there have been an intention to do it, nor would there have been a goal. There would be no action of riding, only an uncontrolled process of my being moved, no matter how sophisticated those movements were. This feeling of control, of course, would be part of self-knowledge that would happen in the immediate activity of my trying to regain control, as I grasp for the handlebars and try to deploy the brakes.

I am riding my bike to the store. The whole action is one thing, as it were one long action-orchestration. I am also, for instance, swerving to avoid a pothole along the way (a sub-action) and drifting out of control (daydream driving) and stopping at lights (a sub-action) and checking my phone while waiting (another action), but these are all unified through my riding to the store, classifiable as what they are only in relation to the whole. If riding to the store did not unify the sub-components in advance, then I would have to make a new decision to go to the store with each peddle push: there would never be anything in general that I was doing. We can describe my trip as a series of discrete events unified within a narrative *a la* Hume, but then what I am doing disappears as my action and becomes an infinity of

deterministic surges of ocean waves in the world. Thus, the “I” that maintains and is maintained within the action of riding must always carry and be carried along as the basis of its unity.

What is this “I” that carries and is carried along as the basis of the ride’s unity? From the empiricist’s perspective, this question has an easy (second path: type 2) or hard (first path: type 1) answer. For the type 2 empiricist who denies real self-consciousness, there is no I and there is no unified action. She must describe everything from a third person perspective that allows for a fictional attribution of the unity of the action and the action of a subject performing it. But really, there are no unified rides and subjects; there are only events in the world. This type 2 empiricist¹⁷ would accuse the Rödlian account presented here of an essentialism, one which finds metaphysical origins, forms, and groupings in a world where there are none. “Riding a bike to the store,” for her, amounts to a cascade of discrete events/impressions that we can group as necessity requires; they do not come pre-ordered within observable intelligible projections. From Rödl’s perspective, however, this type 2 empiricist makes a category mistake. As an idealist, when I speak of the unity of riding a bike, I am not thinking of this unity as having objective criteria that are observable in a third person sense. Rather, I am primarily attempting to understand the action of MY riding a bike. Even if in the course of riding, I were somehow wasting my time in making backwards

17. Most historicists or primary materialists also presuppose, support, or think in unison with this sort of empiricism.

attributions (“Yes, indeed, I was and still am riding a bike!”), from Rödl’s vantage, there would remain an “I” that makes such attributions while it continued on its way to the store. This debate involves conflicting characterizations of action, with the empiricist aimed at the reduction of an activity like riding a bike or playing a game to parts plus narrative and the idealist aimed at a holistic understanding of that activity, in terms of my intrinsic involvement in it.

The type 1 empiricist, to the contrary of the type 2, believes that there is an I who is riding the bike. This empiricist claims that I have a receptive awareness of myself and the bike and my surroundings that serves as the basis for my knowledge of the ride. It may have sounded like I meant something like this in the previous paragraph when I said, “intrinsic involvement,” but nothing could be further from the case. This type 1 empiricist holds that there is an “inside,” first person knowledge within an activity, but she has the same problem talking about activities as the type 2 empiricist. If I am a bubble of conscious awareness (perhaps a sort of quasi-physical cartesian substance roaming around in the world?) and I am receiving impressions of my riding the bike, then even though I am purportedly riding the bike, there is no intrinsic connection between my awareness and any event that happens as a function of my intentionality. I see myself move the pedal. I even will my foot to move the pedal. There is a pedal and a foot and a seeing and a willing, but all these phenomena are external to one another. This type 1 empiricist would have to resort to the non-temporal miracle indicated earlier (she sees all the discrete events and selves together and recognizes that they are linked somehow

outside the passage of time) or else she would have to convert into a type 2 empiricist and say that, after all, even from an interior perspective, we just construct fictional narratives of ourselves and our activities, because that's what they were all along anyhow. The empiricist, whether type 1 or type 2, has no possible grasp on the intrinsic connection between subjectivity and action and outcome: there are only a set of neutral events in a neutral world groupable however one wishes.

I am riding my bike to get groceries in Regensburg. "I" am intrinsically involved in this ride. Why? I am so involved because *I am going to get groceries*. "I"/"ride"/"to get groceries." In relation to my act of riding, these are not three single words, as if the sentence could be broken apart into atoms. These are three positions or modalities of a whole activity: the subject, the action, and the aim, all of which are then condensed into the synecdoche of "the action of riding." Regarding the aim, it supplies the reason for the ride, hence giving an answer to the question: "Why are you riding your bike?" Such aims also apply to sub-actions within my ride: "Why did you swerve to avoid the pothole?" "To avoid crashing and injuring myself so as to be able to continue riding to the grocery store." There are no actions without aims, and when the finite end of a ride to the grocery store is fulfilled (I get to the grocery store) or a ride to get groceries (I arrive home with them), then the action ceases.

Viewed “from the inside,”¹⁸ the end, in a subjectified Aristotelian sense, pulls the action forward, the activity of riding efficiently delivers me towards the end, and the “I” formally unites the whole, as the being for whom the ride takes place.¹⁹ The activity as a whole is unified because it is for the purpose of fulfilling my end. “Why are you going to get groceries?” “For me.” (Even if I get them for someone else, I do so because I want to, and therefore I do it, in the end, for me.) The verb (ride) and aim (to get groceries) are unified with the subject (I) through being for me. Here, I can give a provisional formulation of how practical action is related to self-conscious knowledge. Every “part” of the action, every pedal push and swerve, are referred (through being what they are: a push to move forward, a swerve to avoid a pothole) back to my end and implicitly back to me. Furthermore, my initial formulation of subject and action and end (“I am riding my bike to get groceries”), as well as every pedal push and swerve are part of my reasoning that is involved in solving the problem of “how to get to the store.” Every sub-action that plays a part in getting me to the store is a manifestation of my thinking in action.

Every action involves continual self-reference through my being-active (in reasoning forward) towards an end, referring to that “I” who is being active towards that end. And since I am the singular source to whom the action refers, as it takes place through my acting it out, in being referred to me from out of my doing it, I

18. And now we begin to discuss the intrinsic nature of action, as well as its intrinsic temporality.

19. There is also the material cause, which we will discuss in section D.

simultaneously know that “I” am doing it and I, therefore, possess self-conscious knowledge of myself. For Rödl, I have this self-conscious knowledge from spontaneity (immediately, from the inside) rather than receptively, because I know my “I” through its action: in enacting myself as a being I thereby know myself as the being that I am. Without the unity of subject, action, and aim directed back towards the I, in the spontaneous intelligence of the directed action, there would be no “I.” There are no persons without the actions of persons.²⁰

For Rödl, this unity is primeval. Any time the empiricist attempts to get between the “I” and what it is doing through setting up a mediating veil of reception, the empiricist starts playing another language game, in Wittgenstein’s sense of this term. The empiricist switches from the language game of intentional action involving implicit self-knowledge (our usual one) to a language game of psychological correlation, for instance, between perceptions of sensation, perceptions of desire, perceptions of motion, and representations of goals. Then, this empiricist must put Humpty Dumpty back together again through a narrative or claim that there was no Humpty Dumpty, like a guilty child. Ordinarily, I think I know what I am doing when I am doing it, as well as knowing the I, in the most basic sense of this term, who is doing what he is doing. If someone questions what I am doing, in a skeptical way, I might reply with the common response: “I know what I’m doing.” If a person answers this way, it means that she can give reasons

20. I attribute personhood to myself while I was asleep or when I am in a non-volitional fog just like I attribute personhood to infants who cannot yet engage in intentional (active) behavior. I attribute bodies with the power of personhood.

for why she is doing what she is doing. This commonsense wisdom can be formalized in Rödl's tripartite unity of subject, action, and aim. For anything that is an action, I can automatically say what I am doing and why, even though I can always expand upon my reasons in various ways upon further reflection.²¹

There is an even deeper sense to the unity of subject, action, and aim that enacts both the being of the self, along with automatic self-reference and self-knowledge. We require the distinction between finite ends and infinite ends to comprehend this deeper unity. I ride my bike to the grocery store. Why? To get groceries. Why? So, I can eat. Why? So, I can stay alive. Every action containing a finite end holds within it, as well, an infinite end or a host of infinite ends. I am riding my bike to the grocery store. I do this ultimately, for instance, for my health (as opposed to using a car, neglecting my health). I do this to sustain my life (as opposed to starving). I do this to keep my mental acuity sharp (as opposed to staring at my cell phone on a bus, ruining my perceptual coordination). What is the difference between these infinite ends and the finite ends that host them?

According to Rödl,

Infinite ends are time-general; this distinguishes them from desires. I may one moment feel like going to the movies, the next moment feel like staying home, and a minute later again think that going to the movies would be nice. But it makes no sense to say that, one moment, I cared about my health, was completely indifferent to it the next moment, and a bit later again cared greatly about it. If I want health, then this manifests itself in actions at various times; wanting health is

21. And the fact that I could become confused about what I was doing on reflection does not mean that, weakly, there was no action in the particular case, or strongly, that there is no action at all, since the very meaning of "becoming confused about an action" presupposes its prior unity.

time-general and not tied to a moment. . . . Desires are impotent to explain an ongoing action, since they are changeable states. An infinite end, by contrast, is neither a state, nor is it a movement. It is time-general and thus manifests itself throughout an action and up to its end. In this way an infinite end contains the whole temporal extension of actions it explains. Infinite ends have the right temporality to be the principle of progress of an action. (*SC* 37-38)

When I carry out an action, it starts, and it ends in a certain limited time. If we were only to characterize actions in relation to finite ends, they would be processes. The subject/action/end would involve a movement to the end and that would be it. If this were the case, there would be no I outside the finite existence of aims, and “my” “life” would be a series of disconnected monads.²² As Rödl states, “Infinite ends are time general,” and this means that they are not time specific or finite. What does it mean for an end to be time general, and how does time generality relate to infinitude? I am riding the bike to the store. I say, “the bike is carrying me.” But in a more important sense, it is not the bike but rather the infinite ends for which I ride that propel and carry me to the store. But they do not just carry me to the store this time. The same infinite ends carry me to the store every time I ride, as well as propel me towards an entire host of other finite actions. Ends involving health or survival or cognitive protection, for instance, pervade all aspects of everyday life. These infinite ends are time general in the first sense that they unify the time of the whole ride, as what it is really for, rather than being manifested only at specific temporal points along the ride. The swerving and the

22. A position curiously similar to that of the empiricists, even though we arrive at it differently here. What unites this breaking up subjectivity into a series of events is the absence of infinite ends in both.

stopping and the daydreaming all become means (reasoning towards) or obstacles (stopping reasoning) relative to the time generality of the infinite end, which connects each sub-action or diversion *a priori*.

These infinite ends are time general in a second sense in that they do not refer themselves or me to one time but rather to my being in general. They are general because any specific implementation of an infinite end refers implicitly to a life project. As Rödl indicates in the quote above, I cannot reasonably claim that “one moment I cared about my health, was completely indifferent to it the next moment, and a bit later again cared greatly about it.” A parallel way of understanding this also shows the meaning of the “infinite” within infinite ends, one that explicitly draws on their time generality. Infinite ends always project (me) towards some form of perfectionism. Above, Rödl maintains that an infinite end is neither a state nor a movement, and he later (implicitly) contrasts this characterization with an infinite end being “the principle of the progress of an action.” Infinite ends are infinite insofar as they are indefinitely (temporally) progressing towards an endless goal, either perpetually or unreachably. If my infinite end is improving my mind, which seems like a good infinite end to have, then I can, through my pursuit of finite ends, do better or worse in aiming towards this infinite one. Sometimes, “progress” is just maintaining the status quo perfectly, if the end is “eating enough to keep myself alive.” The perfection here is found in the maintaining of the “enough” against the perils of the world. Sometimes, even though they are time general, an infinite end may drop out of my

life, since certain life changes may make “being the best athlete I can be” irrelevant. And yet, who I am always already relates to a constellation of these infinities that are operative for me, across my life, as well as across the lives of every other being who is a subject.²³

Through being the time general unifiers of actions (subject/action/ends), infinite ends always refer ultimately back to the being of the I who maintains and is maintained through their pursuit. First, they are always about my good (in an Aristotelian sense, an end is a good), insofar as these ends maintain me in my maintaining of them. My life as such makes no sense without the pursuit of infinite ends, so understood in the right way, these ends are “the meaning of my being.” Furthermore, since these ends are pervasive principles rather than movements or states, these ends implicitly refer me to my self’s past and future in every one of their implementations, and this reference is *a priori*. I am riding my bike to get groceries (IE: to be healthy), but this “being healthy,” in a retrojection and projection to both my past and future states of health as well as my past and future pursuits of this infinite end, strings me out across time, almost as if I had left the time of the finite ride and entered a timeless pursuit. In fact, the implicit involvement with infinite ends pulls the projecting “I” back into its intrinsic

23. Infinite ends are not only “time general,” but they are also “space general” insofar as they can exist for any subject, and any given group of subjects can share the same infinite end. More on this in the final section. Differing infinite ends may relativize finite ends in the following way: an architect and a hungry person both may be “going to the grocery store,” but grocery store has a different meaning for both (building and food source) relative to the infinite end.

projective involvement with its being, simultaneously making it what it is and giving it a “time of its own”: the time of its life’s utmost pursuits.

Now, we can clarify what “riding# a bike” would signify in Rödl’s sense. Riding a bike (in empiricist’s terms) can either be read as a timeless event (not an action) or as a process occurring in objective time or for the subjective experience of it (not an action). Riding# a bike, in Rödl’s terms, must be read in relation to the internally projective temporalization in the crossing between the I and the action and the end, all bound within the eternity of an infinite pursuit. This time is not the time of happening but the time of the progress of (a) human life. Infinite ends carry out an “existentialization” of subjects and actions and finite ends, drawing them into the nodal point of the I that binds them as they bind it. This nodal point is not to be found anywhere in the world, and it is not something sensed by anyone else or me, but rather it is something that is known within the enaction of the action itself as I carry it out and it carries me out.²⁴

We may seem to have strayed far from the philosophical formalization (making explicit) of self-conscious knowledge found within any action, but we are actually directly on target. First, the preceding elucidation of the binding of

24. The Heideggerian fleeing from death as the possibility of impossibility (an infinite end) is no more or less ultimate than seeking to be a perfect singer or avoiding bodily debilitation or developing better social skills. Death neither outstrips nor founds the meaning of the being of human life, which is perhaps one reason why Heidegger left this formulation behind after the period of *Being and Time*. As well, all infinite ends project in a middle-voiced sense, since I am not actively wanting to pursue the infinite end directly in any action and neither am I passively caused to do what I do by an infinite end. The pursuit of infinite ends enacts me as I enact it: enactment enacts.

subject/action/end just is a philosophical formalization, albeit a long-winded explanatory one, that moves thought away from its obstacles (empiricism) and towards the thought of the intrinsic spontaneity of the subject in the projection of goods within its life. Secondly, however, our elucidation allows us to situate the sentential configurations such as “I ride to the grocery store” in two ways: A. in terms of their non-subjective placement (such as in empiricist language games) where this really means “this series of body states moves across time points in the direction of the collection of phenomena known as the grocery store,” or B. in terms of the subject’s self-conscious knowledge, where this really means “I ride# to the grocery store.” In this instance, the # really serves as an abbreviation of the discussion above that allows one to think what one already thinks, in knowing what one does when one goes to the grocery store.

But this formalization shows something else. It shows that all action, insofar as it directs itself and moves towards and away and plans and explains and predicts in order to reach its proximate and ultimate goal is always already intelligently structured like a language. In a “sense” weirdly related to (though very different than) Derrida’s (non-)concept of arche-writing: every action is always already written in terms of subject/action/end in their timed yet timeless projective unity: there is no human being outside the intelligible text of human progress, and this text is nowhere and not ever to be located in any present: it exceeds in projecting out of and into spontaneous being, always beyond itself. This spontaneous being has a deeper “inside” than any Cartesian interiority in its spontaneity, through the

infinite end always referring to me, and yet, this deeper “inside” is not a metaphysical substance or soul, travelling no farther from the surface than the implicit or explicit articulation of the word “I” in someone doing something. For Rödl, action is only possible for beings who use language, who reason and plan and regret and hope in regard to their being, and so the “formalization” of action that takes place as a reminding making-explicit merely allows the resonance of the ordinary sentence “I am riding to the grocery store” and the action of my riding to the grocery store to become visible in a philosophical sense (#) as a prophylactic against distortion: words such as “intrinsic” and “infinite” should vanish in the reaching of my hand.

They, however, do not. This is because neither philosophy nor life allow for any essential purity, which follows from the being-beyond-itself through being itself of the subject in pursuit of its ends: progressive perfection, by definition, never completes, and in the gaps, obstacles, deference, missteps, etc., there are always temptations for shortcuts and opportunities for misapprehensions: fallibility lures us into either believing in a total perfection transcending the temporalized pursuit of ends (metaphysics) or else into an empiricism that disavows the pursuit in favor of (both) a fiction of discontinuous events and a return to metaphysics in their implied non-temporal reception. Suppose, again, I am riding to the store to get groceries. Through pursuit of my finite end, I am implicitly committed to infinite ends. These infinite ends stretch and combine my leaving the house and my riding and my shopping. For example, the infinite end of personal well-being may unify my

ride as well as my shopping list, since I ride for my health and I shop for my health when I get to the store. But I can always fail. I can go to get groceries and be tempted to buy the frozen pizzas. But if infinite ends cease to operate, as I now reflectively see they can (as can anyone, when they realize they are doing the wrong thing: the very idea of a wrong thing to do implies an infinite end), then I may despair of their being any purpose at all to doing anything, and instead of reasons for my behavior, I may seek excuses. In her denial of the operation of a prefiguring space of reasons, the empiricist comprehends every action, successful or failed, in terms of an excuse, desiccating it of its active quality entirely. It seems as if I do one thing, seeking my good, and then I do another, out of a random temptation, so I step out of the movement of life's purposive pursuits entirely, thereby showing there is no final purpose to anything (unless it is contained within the mind of God).

Actually, however, in my disconsolation at failure, seeing it break the perpetual unifying of the subject/action/end as the carrying of the I (and this should be heard in a double-genitive sense, the ends carry the I that carry the ends), I radically misconstrue the situation. I should be healthy, and therefore I go to the grocery store to get healthy food. I see the pizza. I am tempted. By what? By a random desire? How did this desire stand in the way of a propulsive carrying as dignified as an infinite end? Was this infinite end (of being healthy) also just a desire, one which was trumped by another desire? Is life a series of conflicting desires? This is what the empiricist believes. In fact, however, things are just the opposite, since desires can explain behaviors, but they cannot either justify or fail to

justify actions. When I grabbed the pizza, I was pursuing the (possible) infinite end of maintaining pleasure within my life (along with various others). Thus, what is at conflict in such a misstep is neither a conflict of desires nor a conflict of desire and infinite end but rather a conflict of possible infinite ends. If I am committed to being healthy, then I am committed to being healthy. But I can also be committed to maintaining pleasure within my life. These ends are not “in themselves” incompatible (since there is no “in themselves,” infinite ends always manifest in finite ones), but they can be incompatible within any given situation: if they show themselves as incompatible for me, however, they both cease to operate as infinite ends. Suppose, for instance (I know people like this, though I do not understand them), someone loves salad more than she loves pizza. This person may have gone to the grocery store to get seafood and broccoli, but instead, to my dismay, she brought home a salad for dinner. She might say that she was tempted by the salad in the same way I say that I was tempted by the pizza. Yet, in her case, there was no conflict because there was a unity of infinite ends. She still rode to the store to get groceries to be healthy, and she managed to concurrently fulfill her end of having a pleasurable life, though not mine.

So, who is right? Her or me? Is it okay to be inconsistent? How often? Is this a question of quantity? And even if it is, what determines when permissive excesses must cease? Can I, for instance, imagine a life where I am always inconsistent, choosing one situation that contradicts another, setting infinite ends against one another? Why not?

According to Rödl,

. . . an infinite end contains a reference to a unity of infinite ends, That an action cannot manifest one's being X and yet manifest one's failure to be Y, if X and Y are infinite ends, defines a sense in which X and Y are one thing, a thing that may be described as X and as Y and is manifested in actions that manifest X as well as in actions that manifest Y. We shall call such a thing a practical life-form in view of a logical analogy. Statements that describe an animal life-form form a system the principle of which is the life-form they describe; judgments that describe an animal as exemplifying a form of behavior characteristic of its life-form presuppose a grasp of this life-form as a unity of forms of behavior. On the current account, infinite ends form a system in this way: thoughts that represent an action as exemplifying an infinite end presuppose a grasp of a unity of infinite ends because an action manifests an infinite end if and only if it manifests the practical life-form that includes this end. (SC, 43)

Just as a plant cannot be a plant without coordinated processes of growth, nutrition, and reproduction, a subject cannot be a subject without the projection of a unity of infinite ends. To understand this, although once again we seem to have strayed and yet have not, we need to return to the formalization of action in subject/action/end. As we have shown, everything in this original formulation is already doubled, so that it could actually be formulated in the following way: subject/action/end—subject*/action*/end*, where the first trio represents the finite situation of action engagement and the second set represents the implicit engagement with the infinite.²⁵ The first formulation does not merely represent, however, a single end and action: every action and end encompass sub-actions and sub-ends, along with the divergences and recoveries that happen in the maintenance of their pursuit. Every action and the nodal points along its way

25. I am using the “*” here differently from Rödl’s use of it in his text.

correspond to the questions that could be posed regarding its specific articulation. Why did you swerve? To continue riding to the store. Why did you turn left? Because it was the fastest way. Every subject/action/end implies a space of reasons through which it can be reasonably explained. This space of reasons is the horizon of the finite pursuit. The end and the action of the I both bind and allow to manifest as such this space of reasons: this “space” is not an independent thing—it has no being apart from the finite pursuit.

The second formulation gives a representation of the deeper meaning of the action in its coordination within an infinite pursuit. But it does something else as well. It gives the representation of the subject not in terms of its life here and now, but rather in terms of its life in general, in terms of what is valuable for it to be what it is. But this subject*, in being exposed in the generality of its existence, is thereby also exposed to the existence of its existence, its having been and coming to be a subject: its being what it is. This being, its practical life-form, involves its having carried on pursuits of its good and its capacity to continue carrying on pursuits of its good. But what bears the expansiveness of this good for the subject is a unifying host of infinite goods to which it is intrinsically committed. Just as the finite action commits one to a space of reasons that fund its articulation (both practical and verbal), the infinite within finite action commits the subject to its own good, which folds outward onto a plurality of goods that must be equiprimordially maintained. Since these goods are good for me, intrinsically referred to me (implicitly) through my finite pursuits, they must be unified and coordinated within

this reference, as I am implicitly committed, from out of my being, to unify and coordinate them. This reference to and from the “deep” general subject and the infinite goods that maintain it in a coordinated, unified sense is# nothing other than the practical life form of the human person, a lifeform every bit as integral and non-relative and non-fragmentary as the lifeform of a plant.

It may seem, at this point, that Rödl’s idealist articulation of the subject in pursuit of its ends finalizes itself in a transcendental moralism: that he (or I or someone) could articulate the necessary and sufficient set of infinite ends and their appropriate unity that would allow any subject whatsoever to “be all she can be.” After all, with a plant or an animal lifeform, one could articulate ideal sets of conditions under which these organisms could optimally thrive, as well as articulate the characteristic dangers that threaten this thriving. This, however, is not true for the “practical life-form.” Because infinite ends are not first and foremost referred back to a set of organisms living in the wild but rather to me, as I exist#, there could never be an ultimate determination of the ultimate, since this arises and is maintained only through the perpetuation of action as enaction (the subject’s projecting itself through its ends). On the one hand, I am committed to the unity of infinite ends within each finite act, and if that finite act falls beyond this unity, setting end against end, I find myself *a priori* convicted, the ultimacy of my ends falling apart, as I await a possible realization, perpetually subject to question, always having my shadow cast in the light of perfectibility. On the other, however, since action enactively refers to my pursuits, these pursuits are always already

being orchestrated from a subjective “inside” that precludes objective knowledge of what the good is, for me or anyone.

Suppose, for the last time, that I am riding to the store to get healthy groceries. This may seem to be for my good all around, such that it could be mandated for any subject in a similar situation. Suppose also, however, that I am doing this not only for my good but also doing it because it is mandated: it may be forced upon me by law or even by a health-zealot keeping me at gunpoint. In this case, I seem to be pursuing my good in both finite and infinite senses, and I seem to be maintaining and maintained, but simultaneously, the pursuit of my infinite end of health is being dirempted from me. In this case, it is no longer an infinite end but rather just an order I must follow, since both it and I have broken down in the face of a gun.

The infinite end of enaction itself, the maintaining of the intrinsic character of the reference to and from an I, shows itself both as that for which the infinite ends are for (the ground of their unity) and as itself an infinite end. I stand before the pizza and I tell myself that I know that it is unhealthy, but I also know that I will not make my life into a militarized zone of healthiness, since biological life is not the whole of human life. Because I must balance the good of my human body with the good of my human autonomy, necessary for the preservation of my being as a practical life-form, I am often in the position of not quite knowing what to do. I may engage the various spaces of reasons, and I may seek the guidance of others in terms of their assessment of these spaces, since as a human among humans, I share

ends with them. Ultimately, however, I must do what I must do, there can be no rational calculus for the maintenance (and improving) of autonomy, beyond a leap into the subject's freedom, a leap for which it is (also) *a priori* responsible to justify, to itself and others. As the subject finds itself outside itself in the subject/action/end—subject*/action*/end*, at that very moment, in the coalescing of its unity in being what it is as it refers to (and knows) itself, this subject is thrown back into itself in its commitment to freedom, including the freedom to pursue other ends or balance the ones it has otherwise, for the unifying maintenance of this very commitment. Notice, however, that within this intrinsic undecidability at the heart of self-perfecting life, I am still always already referring to myself through the question of the good, sustained, sustaining. Sometimes, the self-knowledge in self-reference through being# what one is# amounts to the knowledge of self-uncertainty.

D. Theoretical Self-Consciousness

Judgment (the activity of theoretical knowing), while intellectual and not practical, is still very similar to action, sharing the same basic tripartite structure as practical knowledge. Thus, as one might expect, for Rödl, judgment bears the subject as the subject bears it in a likewise hermeneutically encircling fashion. The subject/judgment, however, culminates not in something that is done but rather in something that is believed: an object. The end of any judgment is an object of knowledge, and, therefore, our basic structure is subject/judgment/object, as in “I /believe/ that Woogie is in the next room” (or “I /think /that Swedgin (my kitty) is

hungry” or “I /know /that it is raining outside”). In the last section, I indicated the temporalized nature of the “verb#” in the indissociable tripartite structure, because even though we very readily associate action with time, this time is usually not clarified regarding its enactive occurrence. In this section, however, for the subject/judgment/object, this making-explicit becomes much more important. Because of our metaphysical and empiricist inclinations, when we reflect on judgment, we do not usually represent judgments as situated in time at all. This de-temporalization of judgment happens largely because we so readily dissociate our intellectual lives from our practical lives, due to many complicated series of diremptions that have long and studied histories.

Unlike in the previous section, where I started with “elements” of action, building up to a synthesizing encompassment, modulating the implicit Aristotelian, Kantian, and Hegelian moments within Rödl’s thought along the way, here I will forgo drama and begin at the end, considering the final circle of judgment first and then elucidating its modalities, often with contrastive reference to those of practical knowledge. Rödl explains matters in the following manner:

When I determine what to believe in this manner, I represent my believing it as an act of a power to gain knowledge by means of the senses, a power of receptive knowledge. Such a power is an infinite ground: it is a ground of beliefs that manifest their subject’s possession of this power. . . . A power knowledge not only is the source of its acts; it is the source of the unity of its acts. This unity characterizes the form of generality of the power. We found that doing something cannot manifest one infinite end and frustrate another. Acts of infinite ends as such exhibit a unity, which we called “practical life-form.” In the same way, it is impossible that a power of knowledge manifests itself in believing something and yet also manifests itself in believing the contrary. One cannot perceive that p is the case and yet have perceived

that it is not the case that p. A power of knowledge confers a necessary unity upon its acts. . . . There is neither need nor room for a calculation that unifies acts of a power of knowledge. The unity of all answers to the question what to believe of this form is contained in the form of each answer. Hence, the unity is necessary and necessarily represented. (SC, 82-83)

To explain this, let us begin with the doubled structure paralleling the double structure of practical self-knowledge: subject/judgment/object—subject*/judgment*/object*. When I make a theoretical knowledge claim (henceforth, just “knowledge claim” or simply “claim”—they are the same thing), I judge that an object (whether simple or a configuration of objects—they are likewise functionally the same) exists. I say “Woogie is on the mat,” implying “I judge (believe, know, think—once again they are functionally identical) that Woogie is on the mat.” Woogie’s being on the mat, that which I claim, is a state of affairs in the world. I, as a finite subject, being here where I am, claim that things stand thus and so—therefore, that a certain object exists (and that my judgment is true—there is no judgment that is not *a priori* held as true).

As a subject, I exist# only through thinking# that things exist and that I can know# them. Even when we discussed the exemplary action “I’m riding to the grocery store” in the last section, this presupposed already a host of implicit beliefs, including: “There is a grocery store to ride to.” A subject as such cannot continue to be# what it is# without reasoning-acting# for its maintenance, but simultaneously, this reasoning-acting# always already references beliefs (and the activity of judging# they presuppose) that populate the space of reasons within which any

possible action occurs.²⁶ So, likewise, a subject cannot be# what it is# without judging# within its active pursuits. In practical knowledge, of myself in my action, I am referred to myself through my finite actions and finite ends, insofar as they are for me in relation to my infinite ends. But our question here is: how does theoretical knowledge refer me to myself in a similar manner? Does it only do so through a parasitism in providing content for the pursuits of ends? Are human beings fundamentally practical creatures, such that their knowing is only an epiphenomenon of their doing? Other than its practical advantages, what is the role of knowledge in human life? Can a human being be#, at least for a time, merely contemplative and curious concerning the world? Should the “merely” have been included in the last sentence, or was it, to the contrary, pejoratively necessary?

In the preceding sections, I have carried out an ongoing critique of the empiricist drive to make receptivity the foundation of the human relation to the self and world. This may seem to imply that I/Rödl dismiss receptive knowledge entirely in virtue of the affirmation of the subject’s spontaneous practical relation to this self and world. Nothing could be further than the case. The human being, just like any other form of animal life, senses its environment, and it is, thus, passively affected by what lies outside it.²⁷ Unlike animal sensation, however, human

26. In fact, I acquire beliefs in the pursuit of ends, and the beliefs I acquire lead to the revision of old ends and the formulation of new ones, which then require the acquisition of further beliefs, and so on.

27. Even though this “passive affection” happens through highly evolved pattern-recognition capacities that structure both sensory physiology and the neural processing of the received input: in relation to spontaneity, it is still passive.

sensation is taken up into a space of reason/reasoning, insofar as human beings can ask for and give reasons for what they claim on the basis of sensation. All sensation and the responses given to this sensation, whether by animals or humans, are “intelligent” to a degree, in relation to the sophistication of the structuring manipulation of these inputs and outputs. But only human beings have sensation that is *a priori* conceptually structured, which means that its data are *a priori* taken up within the sway of a power to give grounding (linguistic) reasons for why these data appear the way they do, which is to say that they are *a priori* taken up within what Rödl calls “a power of receptive knowledge.” The working of this power is a function of both our representational apparatus (sensation, memory, associative ability, etc.) and our capacity to use language: the hallmark of our human intelligence.

I say, “Woogie is on the mat.” This is a judgment. I make this judgment because I see Woogie there. Merely stating that I see Woogie there already finds me appealing to my “power of receptive knowledge,” since I am giving a reason grounded through the power of perception for believing what I have claimed. Someone might ask, “How do you know Woogie is there? Are not you now typing and have looked away? Might not Woogie have left the mat?” To counter, I might respond, “Because I hear Woogie snoring there.” Here I give further reasons for what I believe, while I simultaneously expand my judgmental space into the

A paint by numbers canvas may determine where paint goes, but it still awaits its input of paint.

auditory realm (through inferentially associating information from remembered sight with current information from hearing). Just as my riding to the store encompassed a manifold of “whys” (Why did you take your bike? Why did you swerve? Why did you get broccoli instead of pizza?), the simplest knowledge claim enfolds an entire network of reasons for belief that no animal, save a linguistic one, could master, with various perceptual inputs inferentially coordinated through her language. My “seeing Woogie sitting on the mat” is not just a static perception of Woogie sitting on the mat, but it is also the thinking within this space of reasons, with the concomitant witnessing of this power of knowledge itself in the act.

Within any judgment, there is an appeal to this power of knowledge, with the indefinite capacity it gives me to justify (and seek and criticize) further and onwards. So just as subject/action/end extends into subject*/action*/end* via the passage through infinite ends, subject/judgment/object extends into subject*/judgment*/object* via the passage through (the power of knowledge in its capacity to supply) infinite grounds. Here is how this works: I, as subject, usually through having been asked by another or having asked myself,²⁸ make a claim.²⁹ I say, “Boo-Boo (my Goldendoodle) needs a bath.” I judge X. But also, I judge# X, insofar as I spontaneously articulate, while looking, seeing, thinking, verbalizing,

28. Thus, already within a space of reasons, although I would have already been within this space if I just made the claim out of the blue, as we say (and why?), “for some reason.”

29. I will here only consider concrete claims, although general claims have the same logic.

and planning regarding the X that I judge#. This judging# stretches out already within its articulation, *a priori* referring to me as the one judging#, responsible for judging#, with this “me” likewise extending through its assessments#. Saying that Boo-Boo needs a bath implies a “Why? Because (already a reason) she is dirty,” but I am also reasoning within a space that involves me checking her coat and skin (How do you know she needs a bath? Is it a real need?), remembering what I have learned about dogs (is it proper to bathe her now?), and making inferences involving appropriateness, etc., reasoning through, *in media res*. This reasoning refers to me as it sustains me as a reasoning being who is in the process of determining the facts: I am maintained and maintaining in questioning#/responding#. According to Rödl,

Belief, or theoretical thought, is a reality that includes its subject’s knowledge of it, which knowledge therefore is unmediated first-person knowledge. For, beliefs essentially figure in belief explanations, and it defines this form of explanation that, if a belief can be explained in this way, its subject is in a position thus to explain it. Her knowledge that and why she believes what she does, which she expresses in giving the explanation, is not a separate existence from what it represents. It includes and is included in the reality of which it is knowledge. (SC, 101)

This belief# gets to be put forward as knowing#, as well as being further referred back to my “deep I,” (my being# in general, as opposed to my being in this specific act of judgment, even though my “being# in general” only takes place in the concrete act) through my appeal to my powers of knowledge (unified as “the power of knowledge), including my memory, my differing senses, my ability to form models of situations, etc., as they are taken up within inferential activity. It is only

through this power that I am# what I am#, and I reinforce it as it reinforces me in the activity of cognition.

Just as infinite ends are time general, infinite grounds are time general, though in a different manner. Infinite ends are always already good, but they might not be good until a specific determined time. Eating for my health, as an infinite end, destroys itself along with me when it is carried out while I am sitting on the interstate. Infinite grounds, however, are time general in a more literal way, since the knowledge they produce is supposed to be always true. Rödl claims, “If it is right to do something, there may be a time when it is right to do it; what is right to do now may be wrong to do later, one may fail to act well by acting too late or too early. By contrast, there is no such thing as a time when it is right to believe that such-and-such is the case; there is no such thing as a time when something is true” (*SC*, 79). If I know “Woogie is sitting on the mat,” not indexed to “now” but rather to a specific time—Woogie is sitting on the mat at 10:46am on Sunday, June 16, 2019—then this claim, if it is true, should be true for all time, it should have been true for the future from the vantage of the pharaohs and it should be true for the past from the vantage of our future robot overlords. I project the possibility of grounding this claim towards any time whatsoever.

To judge that something is true (which already happens when I believe anything at all) means two things. First, it means that along with this claim, I project an infinity of perceptually funded reasons that are inferentially linked that will establish this claim (infinite grounds). I commit myself to going on and on, if

called to, in the grounding of what I have said. Insofar as the claim is directly grounded through an appeal to the power of knowledge (“I see Woogie on the mat”), I may find it unreasonable if someone keeps asking, like the skeptic does: “But how do you really know this?” “Because I see him there” might be my final answer, and I will give this final answer because, in appealing to sensation as a ground, I am *a priori* committed to endorse its ability to provide adequate reasons for belief.

However, this does not mean no one may question my statement. Suppose, for instance, I am informed that Woogie was in fact replaced by a similar Corgi earlier in the day, as a joke by a friend. I laughed at the skepticism regarding my claim, but it turned out that I was the one who was wrong. My error, however, does not validate the general doubt of the skeptic: rather it opens onto the propagation of a specific chain of doubts that would re-invoke the movement of the grounding of the claim. These would not be overarching doubts about my senses (although I may caution myself to be more vigilant next time) but rather doubts about whether I can trust my friends, in this case. The possibility of such invocation of uncertainty can never in principle be ruled out, even as it also can never be taken as a ground for doubt in and of itself. This portends that the simplest knowledge claim protends its tendrils into the future, along with me and my responsibility, through a potential reactivation of grounding: I temporalize even in the simplest timeless statement.

Second, however, claiming that something is true, in a manner parallel to the unity of infinite ends in practical action, invokes and commits me to a unity of infinite grounds, as the truth of the true. The truth of the true is nothing other

than the being# of the world: the objectivity of the object* unifying and unified through the subject's* judgment*, as it stands revealed within the claim of reason. I say, "Woogie is on the mat." This implies I judge# the object "Woogie on the mat" to be# the case. I* make this claim by virtue of my power of receptive knowledge (as the claim refers to my intrinsic capacity as a subject.) The judgment# happens in a space of reasons/reasoning whereby I can give grounds for what I claim, both direct and indirect, extending as the situation of doubt or need requires. The judgment is not only about the finite object: "Woogie on the mat." It is also about something in general: an object* in the world. My power of knowledge as a subject* allows me to know objects* in the world. But the phrase "in the world" also implies a totality of objects, in Wittgenstein's sense from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "The world is the totality of facts." The most important part about the phrase "totality of facts" is not the "facts" but rather the "totality," insofar as this totality requires the projection of a unity. If Woogie is on the mat, then Woogie is also two miles from a specific location in Baton Rouge, a certain distance from Paris, lighter than Jupiter's moon Europa, etc. and all these facts must be the case if Woogie is where I say he is. As I give grounds for how I know where Woogie is, even in making the initial claim, I unify myself as a subject through appeal to my power of knowledge (my knowing always already knowing*#). Through so doing, I implicitly establish a relation to Woogie and the rest of the universe, a projected unity of truths in relation that all must hold if any of them do

From the vantage of the empiricist, this will seem either a naïve subjectivism or else a naïve objectivism, depending on whether this empiricist is type 1 or 2. The type 1 empiricist is committed to the immediacy not only of self but also the object as datum of the senses. For her, when I know the world, I do so immediately, not through being *a priori* referred to it as it is referred to me in projective movements of unification. For her, I know the world through immediately being presented with “what I see,” the impression wearing its truth on its sleeve in the power of its presentation. As argued earlier, this “seeing” would have to be timeless, with the establishment of reality passing through an unavowable eternity (the type 1 empiricist wears her mask over a metaphysician’s face). According to her standard of truth, the grounding of the true in projective unities of self and world amounts to deferring truth into oblivion, with its final decision resting on a subjective whim.

For the type 2 empiricist, “truth” becomes a function of narrative utility or coherence or affective resonance or whatever allows the seeker to live with herself in endeavors of inquiry. Rödl’s talk of “powers of knowledge” and “projective unities” would seem to her to be fantasies of objectivity where there can be none, since these projections seem functionally indistinguishable from good stories with self-congratulatory titles. Both empiricists, as such, however, never think from the vantage of knowledge#. Since they do not think the enactive projection of the true in the self-enactment of the subject as immediate self-consciousness in knowledge#, which is also the embeddedness of reception in reasoning, they can only determine the idealist’s account as another receptive representative of the way things are.

The idealist, however, is not giving any account whatsoever, but rather she makes explicit that which is implied within the subject/judgment/object form from the vantage of its inner operation. Both empiricists implicitly mechanize knowledge on the model of the imprint or the digital depiction, rather than (though living in thinking) thinking# knowledge# as a function of our intellectual form of life.

In the course of her reasoning, the idealist will construct coherences and respond to need in a quite utilitarian/pragmatic fashion, given that the very temporality of her activity and spontaneous situation means that she does not unify everything at once or respond to every objection before it is made. This might seem to make the truth of her claims a function of these situational contingencies, but this gets things entirely backwards. For her, the declaration of truth amounts to a commitment, the promise of a projective enactment, a debt that will be continually collected with interest. Truth based on receptive knowledge (nested within inferential projection) can, by definition, only be “provisional,” though since such provisionality has no opposite save in incoherent fantasy: this label “provisional” could only function to appease those who dream of an inhuman knowledge. Any claim to truth is fallible, as a function of its very temporal positing in the judgment#, and it could not be otherwise, and yet, in the invocation of fallibility, a space of better and worse reasons for believing is cooperatively invoked, as the human mind returns to itself, in the referential endorsement of its own power. Since within its judgment, the subject effectively affirms its power, as adequate, in an affirmation that is a function of existence#, not a form of faith or self-belief, the

question of fallibility explicitly arises in a diminishing number of instances. The aura of fallibility, however, perpetually obtrudes in the timely finitude of human cognition, which is why human beings go on talking and reasoning about things they already know.

It may also seem as if the Rödlian idealist is committed to some form of scientism: that the only statements that are true describe states of affairs in the objective, nonhuman world towards which the interests of the natural sciences are directed. This suspicion might appear plausible, for example, given my continuing example of “Woogie on the mat,” which, after all, depicts an instance of *Canis lupus familiaris* on *Gossypium hirsutum*, where the humanized terms “Woogie” and “mat” can be directly associated with their natural origins. This would be a very odd outcome, given that the unifying hermeneutic movement of the subject*/judgment*/object* directly situates the object* within its spontaneous positing as true in the perpetuation of the subject’s rational life, but it also seems like a possible outcome, given that the object* is the non-spontaneous opposite of the subject, unlike ends, in the case of practical knowledge, which exhibit a weird drawing power out of their projection.

Again, however, something quite the contrary holds. Because the object, in its projective truth, gets to be projected only within the enactment of reasoning in the intellectual interest of the subject, this object manifests as a “whatever the subject might make a claim about and give reasons for this claim.” For instance, above I considered the reasoning chain “Boo-boo needs a bath: Why? Because she

is dirty.” I do not know any scientific way of determining when an animal or person is dirty, but I do know that “I know it when I see it,” and I could reason with myself and others in the determination of what counts as dirty and what does not. It does not matter if a consensus is reached: what matter is that the claim implicates me in projecting its grounding. And the commitment to grounding also implicates me in the establishment of better and worse reasons for the establishment of the claim. In making an aesthetic claim, I am obligated to believe that someone could be right or wrong concerning human aesthetic assessments, just as much as she could be right or wrong about the existence of a material object in the world.

For instance, similarly to when giving grounds fails in the “natural” case (I say Woogie is on the mat when he is not, and thus the claim is false), if someone were to maintain that Wallace Steven’s “Emperor of Ice Cream” expresses an astrological prediction, this statement would be equally, even more preposterously, false. I would be as committed to this assessment of falsehood as I am to a direct perceptual claim, as would anyone who has read this poem seriously. “Someone feels blue,” “the water has a transcendent effervescence,” “this horizon shimmers like a star,” and an indefinite number of other objects belong to the ontology of the object* in the tripartite projection. What separates science from art is not the implicit projection to truth in claims made on its behalf but rather the route of reasoning in its technical-methodological configuration (scientific method versus humanistic deliberation, for instance), as well as the difficulty of mounting challenges when these configurations are deployed. Insofar as any enactment of the

power of receptive knowledge is always already conceptually structured within the reasoning of the subject, there can be no “basic appeal” to brute sensation, as if there were any such thing for human subjects, to give us the elementary reality of the physical world. Anything that one can give reasons for claiming, whether of the nonhuman or the human sphere, is elemental. Like other animals, we have immediate sensory access to our surroundings, but unlike all other creatures, except those sapient robots or aliens we one day might meet, our sensation is also immediately related back to subjective-rational projection, as a function of immediate self-knowledge, and so is therefore always already “de-naturalized,” whether its object is a sun or a sonnet.

This de-naturalization, along with the expansion of the natural in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, gives an answer to the question of the supposed priority of the practical over the theoretical: there is none. Because the directing of knowledge# towards the objects refers back to the life of the subject, the mere act of inquiring into the world and seeking knowledge for its own sake never takes place just as “the neutral acquisition of information.” All pursuits of knowledge# expand the space of reasons within which the subject finds itself imbricated and out of which it creates itself, along with new reasons for being, anew. If this “expanding of the space of reasons” is an action and an instance of practical knowledge, then practical knowledge is the more elementary form of being in the world, but this is just sophistry, since the particular activity of intellection, disavowed in our modern era with an almost religious-ascetic fervor, represents a peculiar form of end-in-

itself as an infinite end: it singularly folds reason back onto itself within an intrinsic self-perfecting, practically withdrawing into an interior time beyond the world of deeds, contemplating what can be known before any response is required. Without the world of deeds, the subject ends in having no ends, so the idealist, as committed to the unity of infinite ends, could not rationally support a Schopenhauerian withering of the body for the benefit of the spirit, but neither could she support something like the priority of “the lived body,” formulated in opposition to a Cartesian ghost no one believes in anyway, at the expense of the maintenance of the contemplative life.

E. Materialism and Intersubjectivity

From the conclusion of the preceding section, it may now appear as if our dialectical pendulum has swung too far away from the material world for us to recover it: Rödl’s thought, as promised, is a true idealism, and as such, the interplay between the “human mind” (as the spontaneous “I”: subject/subject*) and its representation (object/object*) undergirds any receptive relation to a material world, existing beyond possible knowledge. This undergirding yields the consequence that any subjective/human construction enjoys the same possibility of truth as any natural object washed upon the cosmic shores, and this outcome appears to imply that even physical states of affairs are merely human representations, of and for the subject in its circling projection. Thereby, if this were the case, any notion of a real material world would flee before the subject’s freeing power. In its temporalization, the subject encounters those things that arise

in the course of its actions and its knowing, and within this knowing, it gives an account of those beings that impinge upon it from “the outside” by virtue of its power of receptive knowledge.

Those things and that “outside,” however, appear as always already conceptually ordered towards the being of a subject that seems little more than a nodal floating point within the articulative happening of reason. No one could mistake this subject for a ghostly sphere surveying phantasmal contents upon an inner theater screen of being’s presentation (as either a sort of Cartesian or Berkeleyan idealist), but this spontaneous subject seems, somehow, to inherit the unreality of these passive, metaphysical subjects and the contents they behold.³⁰ Likewise, this unreality seems to spread virally from this nodal projector to the ends and objects it projects: the world gets pulled into the Charybdis of the subject’s spiral of self-consciousness, its reality drained into the central void. And yet, within these meditations on Rödl’s idealism, I have implicitly carried reference to a materialism pervading and even binding his thought. Naturally, this is neither a rationalist materialism, where the subject somehow deduces a material reality behind the veil of the intellect, nor is it an empiricist materialism, where strong senses communicate with an outside through the force of its thrusts or weak senses

30. Rödl explicitly notes this objection, and he considers his explication of materialism as a response to it: “First person knowledge is spontaneous; it is not an independent reality of its object and therefore does not spring from sensory affection. It is tempting to conclude that the object of first-person knowledge can be nothing other than thinking, and in particular that it cannot be a material reality, as a material reality can only be known empirically.”

construct an outside from the regular irruptions of their data. But if Rödl, as a philosophically reflective subject, neither deduces nor receives nor constructs this implicit materialism, then exactly what form does his access to it take?

We normally associate “the material being” with its reality: it is not a merely an idea but rather something substantial. What, however, constitutes the “realness” of this reality—the substantiality of this substance? Formally, we could say that this real substance has the capacity to make true statements about it true: “There is a chair” is true if and only if there is a chair that makes (and thereby has the capacity to make) it true. This, however, requires “capacity” and “make” to do all the unexplained work. But starting from this provisional point, we can understand that the reality of the material must somehow resonate with its causal power: we can identify the materiality of the real with its capacity to cause truth in the formal sense and with its capacity to manifest causal force, in the pragmatic sense, whereby material things causally affect and effect other material things. In Rödl’s thought, we have had the occasion to explicate two sorts of power: the subject’s power to act in projecting towards its ends within actions (doing#) and the subject’s power to know through receptively claiming truth in the activity of justification (knowing#). Although neither of these two “powers,” on the face of it, closely resemble the brute power we usually associate with materiality, they provide our most proximal means of access to the truth of material power.

Rödl explains his materialism through situating it in relation to that of Marx in his “Theses on Feuerbach.” In the “Theses,” Marx maintains,

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included), is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous-human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, the active side was developed abstractly in opposition to materialism by idealism—which of course does not know real, sensuous activity as such. [Translation Rödl's: (*SC*, 122))

Rödl immediately paraphrases Marx's text in terms of his own project:

All hitherto existing materialism is flawed by its empiricism: it conceives of material reality exclusively as an object of intuition, or as to be known receptively. Idealism shares this flaw, wherefore it develops spontaneity (“die taetige Seite” [“the active side”]) in contrast to the material. According to Marx, true materialism reveals spontaneity and its knowledge to be of, and thus to be, a material reality. Our account of self-consciousness aspires to being materialist in this way.

This implies two significant things. First, Rödl determines the spontaneous powers of the subject to act and know as species of “sensuous-human activity” or “practice,” in Marx's terms. Second, Rödl reads Marx as a sort of idealist through placing him on the other side of the empiricist/idealist dialectic. Rödl here commits himself to the thesis that Marx confuses the problems of empiricism (only knowing “the form of the object” in contemplation) with the problems of idealism, while replicating the position of the Kantian idealist: either Kant was already Marxist, or Marx is still Kantian. This will be impossible to see unless one thinks idealism from the “inside” of the enactive subject, instead of depriving it of spontaneity through understanding the “production” of its object merely in terms of third person representation. For the Rödlian idealist, the experienced world happens for the subject as a function of its active involvement with it, rather than through a scission

between subject and predicate in the shift from articulation into receptive apprehension.

If the “power” of the subject functions within and as “sensuous human activity” or “practice,” then how does this provide a true materialism for Rödl? The first thing to note here is that for Rödl (as for Kant and even Marx, with the appropriate provisos), the fundamental relation to the material world must be one of rational commitment to its existence (not custom or habit in the Humean sense).³¹ The subject’s knowledge of it is “communicated” via an existential engagement that includes its acknowledgement. This means that I need neither “pick out” a specific item as material—“The rock that hit me sure was material!”—nor associate a phenomenal presentation with a material substratum—“The shimmering blue means that my perception was caused by the material H₂O”—but rather (pre-)understands whatever gets to be presented in terms of a nexus of material relatedness. The subject implicitly projects this nexus as undergirding and providing the connective tissue of the causal power of materiality as it

31. When, for instance, I serve a ball in tennis, I am committed to the possibility of the ball either being in or out. This commitment is implicit in the “being” of the serve: there is no serve without it: serving within the sway of this commitment does not require any additional belief to make it so. I, for instance, cannot serve the ball and then claim that I did not intend the ball to be either out or in (perhaps because I was trying to hit a roach on the court, for instance), since in that case, *a priori*, it would not have been a serve, even if it went in and point was scored by a referee. I would be obligated to self-report and invalidate the point, just as much as if the referee had given me a point for doing nothing. When I speak of commitments here, I understand them in this “existential” manner, rather than on the model of the agreed upon contract or the followed rule (these presuppose “existential commitments”: they are formalizations of ordered activity, not its cause).

propagates across time. According to Rödl, “I-thoughts represent a material substance only if they include the application of a material substance concept and, therefore, of criteria of identity. And so they do. The criteria are not applied in identity judgments.” In terms of our tripartite formalizations of the subject/action/end or subject/judgment/object, within their circling references, a material substance concept (an ordering via commitment to material substance) must implicitly operate, if there is to be any relation to materiality at all. After all, the only entities that get represented within these tripartite forms are particular ends and particular objects of knowledge, so if the subject did not pre-apply a “material substance concept,” then it would only encounter an incoherent nominalism of disconnected particulars (the actual plight of empiricism). Rödl’s approach to the problem of idealism is fundamentally Kantian, insofar as he holds materialism to be only understandable as such in terms of idealism.

One principal site of the application of the committal material substance concept happens within the recursion of action/action# during practical knowledge#.

According to Rödl,

Thinking first person thoughts representing movement, “I am doing A”, I apply a material substance concept to myself. In the fundamental case—the one without which there would be no first person thought of a moving substance—I know from spontaneity that and why I am doing something. We have uncovered the source of this nonempirical knowledge of movement: the unity of action explanation and practical reasoning. (SC, 130-131)

“I am walking Woogie and Boo-boo.” I am doing this in order to get exercise and to allow them to relieve themselves: for health*, to take care of my

companions*, etc. I project myself in this walking: I am also “getting walked” while walking the dogs and not just because they are pulling me along, out of their non-rational animal spontaneity: “I” am extended in the reasoning-through of walking as I negotiate corners and rein in the dogs and perform many other sub-actions. In so doing, I project myself (spontaneously think myself) toward my ends within my action, as this action calls me forward in perpetual enaction. Once again, my “spontaneous thinking myself” does not need to involve a separate cognitive production of an explicit thought, such as “Gee, I want to continue walking the dogs now,” although it may. The “thinking” happens within the self-conscious recursion implicit within the rational activity. But insofar as this “projection” in thinking-walking “takes place,” articulating me along the way, this implies that I am a material substance changing across space and time, in relation to other things such as the sidewalk, where these things stay stable as I walk. Without both the materialization of the “I” in relation to the moving-through-acting body and the horizontal background, as it remains relatively stable,³² there would be no walking, no more than there would be a serve in tennis if the ball vanished mid-swing. The “I,” in its being extended out and articulated in actions and sub-actions finds itself always already rationally reticulated within a host of material identities and divergences. Moving/stable substance, as that which becomes orchestrated and re-

32. Some things may change, but most do not in relation to my walking: the houses do not appear and reappear, and the sky does not trade places with the water. If they did, I would no longer be walking. I would not know what was happening, but even in this incomprehension, I would still be referring to the possibility of stable materialization in its apparent loss.

directed and consumed and repelled within the projective fulfillment of ends, finite and infinite, counts as the “primary matter” of being, the material cause accompanying reasoning-through that separates the subject forever from the world of ghosts.

The metaphysician or empiricist, through intellectual or sensible intuition divorced from reasoning-through, attempts to represent this material ground as if it were a specific object rather than the possibility of any knowledge whatsoever, attempting to know it as a finite thing, which also implies that it might not be known, creating the perpetual possibility of skepticism. But when I know this material substance as the basis for all action, however, I know it immediately, as spontaneously as I know myself. Hence, Rödl explains,

It turns out that thereby we have explained how I represent a material substance otherwise than through a receptive relationship with it. I have spontaneous knowledge of the kind of substance I am, the kind of substance that the concept designates that is contained in my first-person thoughts that represent my intentional actions. I know that I fall under this concept not by perceiving a substance that falls under it, but by being a substance that falls under it, or, shorter, by falling under it. (*SC*, 131)

In this sense, I am# of my world as it is# of me, arising for me, projected back before me and projected forward after me, as a function of my acting-reasoning through.

In a similar manner, in the pursuit of theoretical knowledge, within and as the power of receptivity, implicit within its grounding occurrence, I perpetually appeal to “material grounds” as the ongoing solution to the problem of my “Why’s.” The projected unity of the true in the truth of the world is nothing other than the implicit commitment to the materiality of the material. The very “receptivity” with

the power of receptive knowledge already places an immanent (material) sensation in relation to an immanent (material) object that it progressively knows through coordinated acts of interrogation. Since this interrogation co-occurs with the problem solving involved in practical knowledge, as the knowing “what” will complete or hinder intentional pursuits, and since the movement of interrogation, as extended activity, always involves itself in the end of grounding, their commitments to the materiality of the real interlace and reinforce one another, before any philosophical question can be asked about the “basis” of being. The goals of getting the hammer to build the house or avoiding the pathogen to preserve my health bind me both to the materiality of those specific objects, as well as that of the nexus that founds them.

For the Rödlian idealist, the subject “produces” the world (to address the cosmological question posed in the first section) just insofar as her world arises for her only on the horizon of acting and knowing. Since this acting and knowing extends into the infinite, with the subject always already projected beyond its limits, the material world towards which one is addressed extends beyond all bounds as “the universe” (even if this turns out to be a universe of multiverses: they are functionally the same). Reasons for being and reasons for acting invoke this cosmological extendedness, without at the same time emptying this universe as “a thing in itself,” which means treating it (incoherently) as an object of knowledge independent from the subject’s spontaneous involvement with it. To claim, as is sometimes claimed in objection to idealism, that the world existed

before there were any subjects co-involved with it would be beside the point, since the world as horizon given through (and only through) the material substance concept implicit within subjective projection is always already both before and after the subject. The world as horizon, therefore, is always already before and after the subject; this is what it means to be# in the world. What the metaphysician or type 1 empiricist who wants to make this objection does is to demand (incoherently) not knowledge of the world before the subject but rather knowledge of the world independently of the subject, a knowledge that would involve eternal communication with an unreachable outside. For the type 2 empiricist, who might claim that the “world” is a social construct and that matter is a representational myth, the response here would be a bit simpler and would involve throwing a bean bag at her head, in good Johnsonian fashion, and seeing if she ducks, plans, and pursues an intentional plan of self-preservation or revenge: commitments to the causal connectedness of the world in deed and knowledge happens as rational involvement, not as professed belief.

To continue the discussion from the last section on the ontology of the object/object*, Quine’s dictum “To be is to be the value of variable” holds. Anything that can be known or used or avoided or speculated upon counts as “a material thing” and has an equal status of “materiality” as every other material thing. Just as logic does not discriminate regarding what can be the value of a variable, Rödl’s materialism does not discriminate regarding what can count as material. In this sense, Rödl’s materialism amounts to a non-reductive physicalism, where there

exists no elementary order of derivation from one material thing or region to another. Boo-boo is just as basic a material thing as a neutrino is, and the imagined jay is just as basic a material thing as a real one. If “materiality” gets deployed only within the commitment to the material substance concept, then things are assigned the status of material origins, outcomes, substrata, symptoms, etc. only in relation to the projections of objects and ends in which they appear. Certain disciplines such as physics or cognitive psychology enjoy a universality in their pertaining to every representation of a physical object (and notice the two meaning of “representation even here), but that does not mean that the reasons/reasoning involved in physics or psychology can translate the reasons/reasoning in poetry, religion, or expressions of human affection through the media of their shared psychological or physical interlacing. In the commitment to the material, one is *a priori* committed to acknowledging the *more* rational derivation/assignment of whatever one confronts, but this *more* “relativizes” in relation to particular ends and objects (even as it commits one to the pursuit of the good and true in the projections of these ends and objects). I will explain why one bike is better than the other through reference to gears and brakes rather than reference to atoms and neutrinos, and I will explain why one novel is better than the other through reference to plot and characters rather than to molecules and neurons. What counts as an object of knowledge or an end for the projective subject becomes established only on the horizon of this subject’s self-maintaining projection, and although sometimes these objects and

ends are demarcated by the ontology of the basic natural sciences, usually they are not.

Based on the account so far, the “universality” of disciplines such as physics and psychology, however, seems hard to defend, since universality requires more than reference to *a material world* that provides the basis for nomological statements concerning natural phenomena. Over and above this, it also requires reference to *a shared material world*, a world that would make natural laws (and their kin) valid not only everywhere but also for everyone, for you as for me. In the order of explication, Rödl details his idealism beginning with articulation of the self-consciousness of the “I,” since formally, it is only through this “I” that we can first think the “interiority” of spontaneity independently from the self-presence, whether pure or dissipated, of empiricism. But he is committed, in the articulation of the “I,” to give an account of the second person, the “you.” The third person is always a derivative form of the first person: “Woogie is on the mat” = “I judge: Woogie is on the mat.” In order, however, for this statement to have anything resembling objective validity, we would also have to be able to derive this statement from the second person: “You judge: Woogie is on the mat” (and the synthesized correlated “We judge: Woogie is on the mat”). This “derivation from you” needs to take place both in the sense that my claim formally needs your reasoning perspective to confirm it, as well as the sense that I must be able to directly receive this confirmation from you.

If I find myself always already giving and asking for reasons, it follows that I am giving reasons to someone and asking for reasons from someone, but that someone (formally) could merely be myself, as I judge# across time, almost as if I were composing a contra-punctual subjectivity. However, insofar as the “reasons” situate me as a human subject, they would *a priori* have to be addressable to the other human, not merely across times but also at the same time. This implies that two subjects composing a “we” would have to be able to think together the same thing simultaneously, to engage in (what Rödl calls) “thought for two.”³³ This implies that I have an immediate (spontaneous, intellectual) relation to the subjectivity of the other, not a merely sensuous, receptive one. If it is possible for me to address a you as a “you” at all (rather than an “it” transcribed as a “you”), I would have to do this in a manner that is as “interior” as my own self-address# in the articulation of self-consciousness. Rödl’s account of “yourself-consciousness” is essentially bound together with his account of self-consciousness, because it is required for the objectivity of judgement, the true (human) infinity of infinite ends, and for the possibility of actual communication between one subject and another (or host of others).

For the empiricist (and this empiricist is always inculcated within us, as a function of the psychologization/historicizing of the subject in modern life), Rödl’s

33. Rödl: “We said the nexus to me by which your second person thought refers to me consists in my thinking a second person thought about you. Since the relation is symmetric and my second person thought reaches you through yours, we can say that second person thought is thought for two.” (SC, 190).

account will be difficult to understand. For the empiricist, intersubjectivity happens, if it does, through “recognizing” the other subject as such, where this recognition involves some form of receptive knowledge of the interior life of this other. For the empiricist type 1, this takes the form of a directly recognitional knowing of the other, whereby one subject somehow immediately encounters the essence of the other through received “meanings.” In some fashion, through language or gesture, the other manages to express her self-present consciousness into sensible forms such as movements or words. I receive her meanings through extracting it from (or re-constituting it within) her transmissions. I know the other through receiving magical impressions of her being through the medium of my senses. For the empiricist type 2, my relation to the subjectivity of the other amounts to a practice of educated guessing, where I attribute an intentional life to the other based on her various sophisticated behaviors. Since for this empiricist, there is no true subjectivity, I functionally attribute subjectivity to the other, through constructing a “you-narrative,” in the same pragmatic manner I attribute continuing identity to myself.³⁴ As is obvious, none of these empiricist accounts, whether direct or gerrymandering, provide for real immediate knowledge of the

34. Sometimes, either type of empiricist will add the formal (useless) appendage: “I can only know myself through knowing the other,” implying that the unfathomable mechanism of self-presence or self-construction requires the prior operation of the unfathomable mechanism of other-presence or other-construction. Sometimes, either empiricist may maintain that I know myself, only or also, through comparative negation, but this comparison requires the exact same knowledge of the other that I would have first applied to myself: empiricism leaves subjectivity as a mysterious, unfillable hole in being.

other, the sort we regularly presuppose when we chat over coffee. When I say “you” to the other ordinarily, I neither automatically appeal to a process of receptive recognition or hypothesis formation, nor do I believe that I, as an abyss within being, am confronting you as an equal but opposite abyss. I merely reach out with my voice towards you as if I were extending my arm in an action. For Rödl, our ordinary language use is prescient, even though he does not rely on a mere appeal to ordinary language to establish intersubjective contact.³⁵

But if I am not dealing with merely myself in the interiority of my articulating projection in action# and judgment#, then how exactly do I engage the other, if not through the medium of reception? How can I reach the other from the non-substantial intimacy of my own spontaneity? Suppose I am playing chess with my friend Jeff. I say to Jeff, “It’s your move.” I address Jeff directly. On the one hand, this is a claim: “I judge: It’s your move.” I could be wrong, for instance, because it may be my move. I do not mean merely, however, that it is the move of “the person named Jeff sitting across from me.” I do not mean merely, “I judge: there is a move that needs to be made by Jeff.” I am speaking to Jeff about the game we are playing together. In this case, posed in terms of the structures outlined earlier, my relation to Jeff can be formalized as follows:

35. This ordinary language appeal would provide no response to the empiricist. She would immediately reply that the recognition or hypothesis formation postulated by empiricism happens sub-cognitively or very quickly. Therefore, she would argue, the self-account of the ordinary speaker is merely a “folk” account, a primitive hypothesis that needs to be replaced by a more philosophically informed one.

subject/judgment/object/judgment/subject (henceforth @SJO). In projecting that there is a move to be made, it is not only the case that I am making a judgment, but I am simultaneously thinking that it should be Jeff's judgment too: I think in relation to his thinking. Perhaps we disagree about whose move it is. In order even to disagree, however, an @SJO would have already to be invoked, where the object would be "it's somebody's move," an object that we would implicitly co-share and co-think within our discussion.

I am not simply telling Jeff about a state of affairs in the world when I say, "It's your move." In proclaiming, "It's your move," I am also telling him to move; I am asking him to engage in the pursuit of a finite end. Our complementary practical structure, therefore, is subject/action/end/action/subject (henceforth @SAE), with my performance of a request and his projected action of a move all pre-contained within the address. I am already thinking the possibility of his intentional action in my address to him, as well as already thinking the possibility of his assessment of an object in the world. I could have made no sense of sitting with another person across a table, or both of us playing on the same board, or of playing the same game together without the precedent engagement with a "shared space of subjectivity," where this "space" involves a coordinated projection of subjective interaction. Within this interaction, we may diverge in a multiplicity of ends and perceived objects, but in order for there to be interaction at all, we would also have to share a multiplicity of objects and ends, and therefore, we would have to be able to think them together.

My “thinking together with Jeff” does not require me to project myself into his perspective through a feat of imagination, as if I had to take over the vantage of his receptive knowledge of the world, although I may try to do this at times. I am, rather, committed to his sharing the power of receptive knowledge with me,³⁶ as well as the power of practical action³⁷: thus, I am also committed to the pair: @SJO* and @SAE*. The shared object* would be, in this case, the reality of the game, and the shared end* would be the pursuit of perfection in playing. In projecting my object* and end*, in playing a game, I am simultaneously projecting his, not the ones that he empirically imagines (he need not explicitly think anything at all—he may just play) but rather the ones to which I find him already co-committed through being my playing partner. When I address the other person or play a game with her or have an argument or engage in any other form of interaction, I am committed to a host of co-implications and co-thoughts and co-objects-and co-ends, of the sorts that one might expect if multiple people communicate within a shared world. Rödl expresses the reciprocity that I have here

36. Rödl: “So the same power of receptive knowledge accounts for my explanation why, and thus for my knowledge that, you believe what you do, and accounts for your believing it. The power whose presence in you accounts for your belief is the same as the power whose presence in me accounts for my knowledge of your belief.” (SC, 185)

37. Rödl: “Second person knowledge of action, too, has the same ultimate cause as its object. In the fundamental case, I know that someone is doing something intentionally by explaining why she is doing it in a way that reveals it to be good to do in the sense defined by our practical life-form. (We can now say “our”, as we have excluded that I bring someone under a practical life-form that is not mine.)” (SC, 186)

formalized with the “@” structures as follows: “So our result is this: your nexus to me by which I am the object of your second person thought consists in my thinking a second person thought about you. Your second person thought reaches me through my thinking back at you in the same way, second personally” (*SC*, 186). Since my thought about you is a thought about you thinking something that I also think, we are bound together in a projective# encircling relation of reciprocity.³⁸

Any given person may fail to treat the other as a subject at any given time: to avoid distraction in her work, a doctor may train herself to focus on the leg instead of the whole patient. If I am running down a path and you walk out in front of me, I might move to avoid you, in a way no different than I would have moved to avoid a falling tree limb: for me in this case, you would be a thing among things. There are a thousand different obstacles and pitfalls along the path of human interaction. The skeptic towards other minds, a creature born of empiricism, takes these possibilities of severed relation and attempts to make them into the rule, requiring and never receiving adequate evidence to heal the supposed original wound. The other may become a mere perceptual object, so the other is always a perceptual object unless proven otherwise, an automaton who simulates subjectivity rather than having it.

38. This means that the @SJO and @SAE are not to be read linearly but rather bi-directionally, as they involve the spontaneous circling interaction between two subjects, where this spontaneous circling interaction is also sometimes called conversation.

But as in the case with skepticism regarding the existence of objects in the world, individual failures do not imply failure of the whole but rather just the opposite. If I were not *a priori* committed to thinking with the other as such, reasoning in the same world as her, I would never make sense of anything that might be lost through skepticism. My original relation to the other subsisted neither through a theory or a habit or a belief but rather persisted through the cooperative enaction of a shared situation. According to Rödl, “Second person thought requires and includes first person thought, for I apprehend a self-conscious subject through an order under which I subsume my own acts and that I represent first personally. . .it is equally true that first person thought requires and includes second person thought. The same power is exercised in both ways of thinking” (SC, 192). In this sense, just as I project# enactively from an extending# inside, there is always already a co-projecting#/co-extending# where our world complicates for us together, in the transcending articulation of joint reasoning.

For Rödl, the spontaneity of reasoning-through yields both the immediate address of the other and the requisite intersubjectivity for the external assessment of objective claims. This happens not only contingently, when I encounter others in the course of daily activity. The subject/judgment/object and the subject/action/end already necessarily pre-figures the @SJO and the @SAE. These active projections, as they are referred back to me, also refer back to human powers of action and knowledge in general, powers that hold the grounding capacities of the space of reasons in place. These “powers in general” require that other human beings could

also hold and evaluate my ends, and they could accept or reject my claimed objects as true in the activity of giving and asking for reasons. @SJO* and @SAE* imply a meta-subjectivity which *a priori* involves a possible host of other subjects, and any deed or claim, no matter to what extent privately articulated, always takes place on the horizon of this meta-subjectivity, almost as if these events were receptacles, awaiting fulfilment by partners in universal reason.³⁹

Without this implicit meta-subjectivity, we could only understand science in an empiricist fashion, as being grounding through the indoctrinated regularity of communal responses, and we could only account for communicative addresses by explaining them as being funded through bio-socially imprinted habits of interaction, with the pursuit of real objectivity and real contact given the statuses of politely tolerated (or relativistically rejected) illusions. As spontaneous and intellectual, however, the human powers of reasoning-through, in their interactive dimensions, transcend these sensible veils, behind which the truth of the world and the truth of the other lie hidden. These powers yield immediate social involvement with an immediate social world, an involvement not dependent upon culture but rather founding it, giving selves within the material world things to differ over, as they engage whatever arises in the pursuit of everyday human life.

39. Rödl: “A formally represented order that sustains first person thought and its way of knowing as such sustains second person thought and its way of knowing. An order that is a source of self-consciousness as such is a source of mutual knowledge of its instances. Subjects united under an order of reason know each other through this order.” (SC, 194)

Chapter 3. Emerson's Idealist Poetics

A. The Opening of *Nature*

Emerson begins his work *Nature* as a writer of spontaneity responding to empiricism. *Nature's* "Introduction" commences as follows:

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship. (*TCRWE* I, 7)

Above, we saw Rödl helpfully paraphrase Marx's first thesis from the "Theses on Feuerbach" to show anti-empiricist commitments synchronize with commitments to materialism and sensuous activity. In reading the opening paragraph of Emerson's *Nature*, I find it similarly felicitous to transpose Emerson in terms of the opposition between spontaneously (en)active idealism and receptively passive empiricism:

Our age is empiricist. It passively fixates on external, bygone origins. It constructs historical narratives to account for its being. Previously, human beings engaged God and nature spontaneously. We do this through their recorded accounts. Why should we not also enjoy a spontaneous relation to the universe? Why should we not have a poetry, philosophy, and religion of spontaneous insight and not one passively received from historical tradition. Given that we are materially enacted within nature, powerfully projecting in response to its powerful demands, why should we historicize or construct ourselves based on impressions? The pervasive objects and ends

towards which we think and strive never vanish. Let us demand enactively projected spaces of reason to pursue them.

Importantly, this transposition loses the nuances of Emerson's phraseology, eliding images of being "embosomed for a season," streaming "floods of life," and our "groping among dry bones," etc. Unlike with Rödl's translation of Marx, which required only a slight conceptual shift, a movement from one abstraction into another, the above transmutation involves, along with its even more slight conceptual shift, a significant loss of the poetic dimension of Emerson's writing. What, however, do we lose by translating away these images? Other than lending a lyrical sheen to his demands, what does the irruption of such grand figurations contribute to Emerson's imperative?

Emerson utilizes a host of poetic strategies that resonate with the philosophical practice of the making explicit of self-consciousness, sometimes directly complementing this practice, sometimes momentarily resisting its intellectualization, or sometimes moving together with it in an interwoven fashion.⁴⁰ These strategies deploy sometimes more personal language, sometimes more viscerally affective expressions, sometimes more painterly figurations, and

40. In Orestes Brownson's 1836 review of *Nature*, he makes a similar point, maintaining, "This book is aesthetical rather than philosophical. . . . Yet it touches some of the gravest problems in metaphysical science, and may perhaps be called philosophy in its poetical aspect" (*BR* 9/10/1836, 2). It has not been the case that careful readers of Emerson have been unaware of the issues of the relation between poetry and idealism in Emerson's work raised in this dissertation. Yet these writers did not have the technical apparatus of Rödl's linguistic idealism to utilize in order to elucidate the precise conceptual structure of these relations.

sometimes more rhetorical gestures in the service of resisting/overcoming more mundane concretions of empiricism than those normally occurring (argued for explicitly or diagnosed as implicit) in philosophical language. The “writing of spontaneity,” as it takes place in Emerson’s work, operates in a fashion complementary to the philosophical explication of self-consciousness. “The complementary,” however, is not “the identical”: in Emerson’s work we find the crossing of ambivalent relations between a philosophy of self-consciousness and a poetics of self-consciousness. The question of the poetic writing of spontaneity in relation to the philosophical writing of spontaneity is the question of the nature of this ambivalent complementarity.⁴¹ In order to investigate this, we must first attend to *Nature’s* opening passage. On its basis, we can discover crucial aspects of Emerson’s essential orientation:

- 1.) Emerson begins *Nature* from the self-conscious vantage of the active subject, which means that he opens *Nature* with a commitment to idealism, as characterized above. Idealism is not for Emerson a doctrinal term that will show up sporadically in his work, divorceable from the rest of its content.

Idealism is woven into Emerson’s style as a practice of making explicit, even

41. Long before the term ‘prose poem’ gained currency, in 1838 Elizabeth Peabody wrote the following in an anonymous review of *Nature* from *The Democratic Review*: “In We have said that ‘Nature’ is a poem; but it is written in prose. The author, though ‘wanting the accomplishment of verse,’ is a devoted child of the great Mother . . .” (I, February, 1838 319-321). She recognized that Emerson’s work is a site of crossing where the conceptual is perpetually turned towards a practical transcendence that can only be reached through the figurative twisting of the straightforward idea.

if Emerson does not carry out this activity in a rigorously philosophical sense. Emerson's promptings towards "original relation," "insight," and "revelation" and his imperatives for self-reliance aim at drawing the reader into the spontaneity of the projective moment, while they also require reasonable action to secure the subsistence of this moment. This prompting happens here primarily through Emerson's use of the imperative "should," which calls for the transition from passive retrospection into the present activity of the subject and her community. This call from passion to action takes the powerful form of a demand. Even, perhaps, an ethical one.

Later in *Nature*, in the chapter "Spirit," Emerson details the end of this imperative, which is not an imperative towards a concrete transformation of the world but rather an imperative towards a certain form of self-consciousness. Within this self-consciousness, spirit turns towards itself, but in so doing, it learns that it is a circulating flow of possibility:

But when, following the invisible steps of thought, we come to inquire, Whence is matter? and Whereto? many truths arise to us out of the recesses of consciousness. We learn that the highest is present to the soul of man, that the dread universal essence, which is not wisdom, or love, or beauty, or power, but all in one, and each entirely, is that for which all things exist, and that by which they are; that spirit creates; that behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; one and not compound, it does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves: therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. (*TCRWE* I, 38)

One might get the impression here that Emerson, like the type 1 empiricist, is thinking of the soul as a sort of substance to which the mind has special access.⁴² On such a reading, the trunk of the soul would give birth to a branching host of impressions, including the beings of nature, and we would intellectually “sense” ourselves through knowing this impressive substance within a special interior apprehension, a paradoxical immediate self-relation. But immediately following this metaphor of the tree and its branches, Emerson immediately relativizes this trunk on the horizon of a higher/lower ground:

As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws, at his need, inexhaustible power. Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? Once inhale the upper air, being admitted to behold the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite. This view, which admonishes me where the sources of wisdom and power lie, and points to virtue as to

“The golden key

Which opens the palace of eternity,”

carries upon its face the highest certificate of truth, because it animates me to create my own world through the purification of my soul. (*TCRWE* I, 38)

42. In 1837, Francis Bowen had exactly this sort of interpretation of Emerson. In a review in *The Christian Examiner*, he argues, “But he [Emerson] brought no arguments to disprove the existence of any thing exterior to mind. . . . The belief still exists, and its universality is a fact for which the idealist cannot account. This fact puts the burden of proof upon him, and it is a load he cannot support” (*CE* XXI 01/1837, 371-385). Bowen believes that Emerson is positing the mind as an independent self-supporting substance that hosts the external world, and he believes Emerson fails to demonstrate this independence. But, as argued here, Emerson is not trying to show that the mind is a self-knowing substantial container but rather exposing its projective operations of thinking its world.

Here, we find both that a.) the soul is not the original basis from which nature springs but rather the “bosom” of God. We do not have direct access to a transcendent God but rather to that which emanates from this oddly maternal bosom— “unfailing fountains” and “inexhaustible power,” and these fountains and that power represent “the possibilities of man”; and b.) the human herself is “the creator in the finite,” so that which would be the original source, the ground of the trunk of the soul, is itself a synecdoche, the creator become a part of creation, finitized without the possibility of metaphysical transcendence.⁴³ Thus, “creation” becomes nothing other than an interior circulatory flow whereby I “create my own world,” not through shaping the world through the force of will but rather through a “purification of the soul” whereby I recognize this “palace of eternity” within the infinite possibilities of the given world.⁴⁴

43. In *American Spaces of Conversion*, Andrea Knutson provides a succinct statement of this paradox wherein a projection of the infinite is maintained within finite human life, transforming into a productive, well-lived life: “Emerson claims divinity for humans, but this does not imply that the method for “confront[ing], face to face, the image of a blinding divinity” is any less necessary for remaining in productive touch with experience” (104).

44. In a 1937 letter to Emerson, Thomas Carlyle called this purifying movement, “the true Apocalypse: this when the ‘open secret becomes revealed to a man. I rejoice much in the glad serenity of the soul with which you look out upon this wondrous Dwelling place of yours and mine, --with an ear for the . . . “*Ewigen Melodien*” (TCEC 1964, 157). Both the philosophical and poetic making-explicit of the truth of idealism have the form of the revelation of a secret rather than the representation of a fact. Whereas knowledge of a fact gives a new piece of information, the revelation of a secret bursts the bonds of the hidden and brings forth a new set of relations.

2.) Although Emerson does not mention empiricism explicitly in the passage opening *Nature*, his urgings towards spontaneity structurally commit him to oppose empiricism, and he fulfills this commitment through propelling the work of spontaneity against some of empiricism's distorting guises: retrospective memorials (passively received in the fashion of the type 1 empiricist) or constructed textual impressions (conjoined into a fictional narrative order in the fashion of the type 2 empiricist) of past life. These figures include "sepulchers" and "biographies" and "histories" and "tradition," structures that bind us to a fundamentally passive relation to existence. These are vehicles of ultimate passivity—vehicles of death. Emerson's judgment on these retrospective constructions, at least initially, may seem harsh. We might ask, "Cannot we actively and self-consciously construct a sepulcher or write a biography?" Tombs and biographies, after all, provide some of the greatest art from our past. Emerson, however, is not exactly denying us these opportunities: we can engage with any constellation of objects and ends within the living-thinking of life. Emerson is not problematizing "relations to pastness" for the service of a specious present. Otherwise, supposing he is consistent, he would not go on to write such works as *Representative Men*, engaging the actions and thoughts of the great departed. Emerson understands the works of memory in this passage (such as histories and criticism) as implicitly inflected (or even infected) with the distorting passivity of empiricism. These works not only hold the echoes of

things that have died, but such recordings, when impressed in the retrospective spirit, morbidly share in their demise. Empiricism, in this sense, is not merely a philosophical doctrine but rather a distorting manner of the subject's engagement with its world. In relation to these more concrete instantiations of empiricism, Emerson's admonishments and encouragements would have to be heard, in their making explicit the problem and the loss implicit within it. They would also have to be apprehended as bio-graphed counterexamples, exhibiting the possibility of a living mode of creation in the articulation of their critiques: a poetic writing set against, as an antidote to, the deadly prose of the past.

Although the empiricist, in fact, believes that the impressions upon which she rests her projections, constructions, and representations are more solid than the ephemeral presentations of projective consciousness, in fact, the opposite is the case. In his essay "The Transcendentalist," Emerson shows this through his critique of "the materialist," who for our purposes is nothing other than a version of the empiricist. This materialist, after all, has no metaphysical proof for the existence of an external realm of extended substance. Rather, she precisely rests her "proofs" on the naked evidence of the senses as they provide singular bursts of the given real:

The materialist, secure in the certainty of sensation, mocks at fine-spun theories, at star-gazers and dreamers, and believes that his life is solid, that he at least takes nothing for granted, but knows where he stands, and what he does. (*TCRWE I*, 202)

This security and certainty of the materialist, however, is short lived, since it is “easy to show him, that he also is a phantom walking and working amid phantoms, and that he need only ask a question or two beyond his daily questions, to find his solid universe growing dim and impalpable before his sense.” For his example of a materialist, Emerson chooses a capitalist who precisely believes in the foundations of his banking house, the “Quincy granite” on which this house rests. Emerson claims that these foundations, that granite, is not set on the solid “cube” of substance but rather on a set of unknown intellectual relations. Since the materialist as empiricist seeks the firm impression as the ground, the flowing field of projective relations enacted by the subject as it creates its world and its world creates it are invisible to her. Therefore, for her, since “real” matter outside the mind is unprovable, her foundations come to rest “on the edge of an unimaginable pit of emptiness.” Furthermore, even her mind, that from which she distinguished the supposedly solid granite foundations itself, from her vantage, seems just as “strange and quaking foundations as his proud edifice of stone.” Whether through retrospective memory or prospective digging, the materialist/empiricist disavows idealist engagements with the world, seeking to stabilize it beyond projects of finite human creation, only to find that retrospection and propection lose the grounds that they seek to find.⁴⁵

45. In her 1838 review, Elizabeth Peabody quotes Emerson precisely where he shows that empiricism/materialism loses the very substance of human life in its attempt to maintain substance against idealist ephemerality: “Many philosophers

3.) Along with drawing the reader into the demands of the “should” and away from passive retrospection through his juxtaposed words, Emerson’s voice enacts the demanding turn away from the passive reception of the world. Emerson deploys a practically, if not an actually, ministerial voice in calling together the congregation into the communion of the “we” and the “us.” The call to each member also implicitly resides within this convocation, a call that demands that I address Emerson as he addresses me in our shared world together. We can transpose the polite yet urgent imperative “Let us demand our own works and laws and worship” into an imperative for “enactively projected spaces of reason,” because in receiving this imperative itself, we find ourselves already within the extending space of this reason. Emerson impels us, in the terms from the discussion on intersubjectivity above, into the @SAE(*): we are brought into the shared projection of finite and infinite ends. We may reject these ends as such for us or we may accept them, but in either case, Emerson brings us to reason about them together in the present, if only for a moment. Emerson’s formulation of the demand for “our own laws, works, and worship” does not make explicit the shared space of reason these things carry with them in the abstract way Rödl does. This space, however, is made explicit (or its implicitness is strongly insinuated) precisely

have stopped at Idealism. But, as Mr. Emerson says, this hypothesis, if it only deny, or question the existence of matter ‘does not satisfy the demands of the Spirit. It leaves God out of me. It leaves me in the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end. Then the heart resists it, because it baulks the affections, in denying substantive being to men and women’” (319-321).

in the juxtaposition of icons of death and passivity with the required actions for life.

For Emerson, these demands and provocations are not external rhetorical ornamentation appended to a transcendental argument. Rather, Emersonian imperatives employed within the ministerial voice intensify the purifying movement of the soul back into itself and its projective world. Concerning the speakers of such a voice, we hear Emerson's commendations in his "Divinity School Address":

The divine bards are the friends of my virtue, of my intellect of my strength. They admonish me, that the gleams which flash across my mind, are not mine, but God's; that they had the like, and were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. So I love them. Noble provocations go out from them, inviting me to resist evil; to subdue the world; and to Be. And thus by his holy thoughts, Jesus serves us, and thus only. ... The world seems to them to exist for him, and they have not yet drunk so deeply of his sense, as to see that only by coming again to themselves, or to God in themselves, can they grow forevermore. (*TCRWE* I, 83)

Within this address, we can see these largely Rödlian characteristics of Emerson's idealism, transformed into a practically poetic turning of the soul. I resist the world as externality through turning into myself, "to Be," and I, like Jesus, in hearing these words turn towards the divinity in myself, not in a movements towards Platonic permanence but rather so that I can ceaselessly project and "grow forevermore."

Empiricism as a philosophical stance obfuscates or destroys the subject of action and judgment. Empiricism, as concretized within historical retrospection, obfuscates or destroys the activity of life. We can counter empiricism through the making explicit of self-consciousness in its circling enactment. This making

explicit, however, is an activity unto itself, and in order to pursue it as an end, we must remove obstacles that stand in the way. One way of doing this is through criticizing concepts of passivity and replacing them with concepts of activity: this is the work of philosophical critique. Another way of removing such obstacles is through transforming the practices that embody retrospective concepts into practices instituted through prospective concepts. In the overcoming of empiricism, we must both abstractly and concretely turn our focus towards projecting from historical existence rather than retrospectively receiving a dead past. Like philosophy for Marx, writing for Emerson is “revolutionary activity,” although not in the same sense that Marx gives this term. Emerson, in demanding “our own” practices, places the implicit emphasis not on acquiring the newly created possession, but on exchanging our practices for ones that are self-consciously marked by ownness. This exchange would require us, insofar as empiricism inflects our lives, to reclaim that which is given, our history itself (abstract and concrete) in the name of the projective subject. There is a natural transition between the overcoming of empiricism, a doctrine that presupposes dependence on external affection and grounds, and the movement into self-reliance, where the soul becomes the center and founder of itself in its projective activity:

. . . there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works; . . . a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things. Where he is, there is nature. He measures you, and all men, and all events. Ordinarily, every body in society reminds us of somewhat else, or of some other person. Character, reality, reminds you of nothing else; it takes place of the whole creation. The man must be so much, that he must make all circumstances indifferent. Every true man is a

cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his design; — and posterity seem to follow his steps as a train of clients. A man Caesar is born, and for ages after we have a Roman Empire. Christ is born, and millions of minds so grow and cleave to his genius, that he is confounded with virtue and the possible of man. (*TCRWE* II, 35)

Once again, we have what might be called the classic Emersonian movement whereby the finite individual becomes “confounded with the virtue and possible of man,” so that the projective possibility of the soul becomes exposed within the individual engagement. Note that this does not mean that the individual megalomaniacally believes herself to be the overlord of existence: in exposing itself as possibility, this soul also becomes swallowed up within this possibility that outstrips it, possibility that it must project from and into. The lesson here is not that the individual should occupy the position of Caesar’s power or Christ’s authority in their substantive (external) dimensions but rather that the subject should own its possibility, whatever it is, and project from it with a trueness of character like that of Caesar or Christ.⁴⁶

46. Denis Donohue provides the following cynical objection to Emerson’s formulation of individual human possibility: “The offer Emerson’s essays make goes somewhat like this: ‘Wouldn’t our lives be much as I describe them, if we took seriously the sufficiency of the private man, exerted mind and will together as power, and regarded the whole world as having been given to us for our instruction and use?’ It is not surprising, then, that Emerson was just as readily available to Pragmatism as to Transcendentalism: the vocabulary of property, commodity, use, exchange, instrumentality” (*Emerson and His Legacy*, 1986 26). This is cynical because it presupposes that the “property” of character is a priori commodified as a form of private ownership, even if it is garbed in clothes of the transcendent. But for Emerson, the private is not the personally owned but rather the secretly shared, so that in coming into one’s own, one exposes oneself as being already involved within the projective community of the human.

We find this imperative (from *Nature's* first paragraph) calling life to resist empiricist retrospection confirmed within Emerson's essay "History." That essay does not commence with the explicit imperative to resist retrospective passivity: in its opening, Emerson's words affirm the positive pole of a dialectic that has practically forgotten its other half. But during his encomium of history, in a transitional pause, Emerson demarcates the distinction between active and passive history that provokes his accentuation of the positive:

These hints, dropped as it were from sleep and night, let us use in broad day. The student is to read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary. Thus compelled, the Muse of history will utter oracles, as never to those who do not respect themselves. I have no expectation that any man will read history aright, who thinks that what was done in a remote age, by men whose names have resounded far, has any deeper sense than what he is doing to-day. (*TCRWE* II, 5)

This passage tells us that we must resist interpreting history as something passively given in books and, instead, understand it as the active unfolding of our own living. When we comment on the recorded annals of history, we do not comment on history properly. In so doing, we merely comment on commentary, exhausting our efforts in the service of the dead. Such commentary involves a disrespect of the life of the present as a fulcrum of history. Therefore, the proper reading of history will avoid giving overarching significance to echoes of dignified ancestry carried from foreign lands. Emerson prefaces this argument with the implications that this passive relation to history already ensnares us and that the "hints" in the preceding encomium, along with the making explicit of our problem in

this very passage, allow us to see the true relationship between the active and the passive “in broad day.”

B. The Problem of Our History

What is the relationship between history as passive commentary and this darkness in which we, as readers of Emerson, find ourselves, such that we need to be awakened from it by him into broad day, if we take his Platonic rhetoric seriously? We need search no further for a source in which to find answers than a typical history textbook for use in school. For instance, a characteristic history textbook from Emerson's time, *History of the United States, From Their First Settlement As Colonies, To The Close Of The War With Great Britain. To Which Are Added Questions, Adapted For The Use In Schools*, published by Uriah Hunt in 1835, embodies this passivity and darkness in its very title. The schoolbook commences with its lessons as follows in the opening paragraph:

The continent of America was probably unknown to the ancients. If once known, as some have supposed, to the Carthaginians, the Scandinavians, and the Welsh, all knowledge of it was afterwards lost. The discovery of this extensive region, constituting nearly one half of the habitable globe, was the accidental result of the attempts, made in the fifteenth century, to find a passage, by sea from the ports of Europe to the East Indies, whose precious commodities were then transported, over land, by a long, dangerous, and expensive route. (AH, 7)

This list of successive facts put together in the form of a paragraph, we might imagine, failed to engage the nineteenth century eighth grade pupils required to learn them. But we do not have to imagine being children in the eighth grade in nineteenth-century America to understand the boredom such passages inflict. We were those children in our own time, forced to study similar textbooks, even if our more modern textbooks were also more historically accurate and politically nuanced. The passive commentary and its surrounding darkness shaped the child's

entire experience of education in Emerson's era, and it largely continues to do so in ours, despite our advances in technology and cultural erudition. These textbooks are paradigmatic examples of history in its utter diremption from the life of the subject. The trained passivity of students mirrors the passivity of the textbooks imposed upon them. In the essay "Education," Emerson complains, "It is ominous, a presumption of crime, that this word Education has so cold, so hopeless a sound. A treatise on education, a convention for education, a lecture, a system, affects us with slight paralysis and a certain yawning of the jaws" (*CWRWE* X, 133-134). He goes on to proclaim, "I call our system a system of despair" (136). Receptive knowledge of the world, including the knowledge of our past, is the only knowledge that we have, and yet, if this passive relation to knowledge becomes primary, obscuring the activity of a subject who poses questions and seeks answers on a horizon leaning towards truth, relevance, and a better life, then this knowledge contains enough untruth, irrelevance, and banefulness to outweigh its advantage.

In our education (and I include in the "our" both those nineteenth century pupils and our younger selves), there is an obvious empiricism of content in the prosaic listing of impressive events found in history textbooks, but more crucially, there is an empiricism incorporated within the institution of educational life—in the passive positions of pupils constrained to desks, in the droned delivery of unchangeable information, and in the institutional requirements that reward detailed accuracy of response while punishing inspirational engagement. A direct link, we would be required to say, connects Emerson's concerns with education and

Dewey's call for progressive schooling in such works as *Democracy and Education*, and yet, we should inquire why we naturally seek out this link rather than engaging in the action of educational reform.

In a manner directly parallel (and probably directly referring to) the opening of *Nature*, in *Democracy and Education* Dewey critiques the retrospective model of education, seeking to replace it with a prospective education that engages the present for the sake of the improvement of future experience.⁴⁷ Dewey directly follows Emerson's rejection of empiricism in criticizing retrospective education for focusing on disconnected, bygone contents. In its place, prospective/progressive education would precisely gear itself towards the improvement of the child through shaping her capacity to engage the present and expand its possibilities in the pursuit of knowledge and ends:

Education may be conceived either retrospectively or prospectively. That is to say, it may be treated as process of accommodating the future to the past, or as a utilization of the past for a resource in a developing future. The former finds its

47. Naoko Saito, in *The Gleam of Light*, expertly draws the intimate connections between Emerson and Dewey (and Cavell): 'Dewey in this book [*Reconstruction in Philosophy*] explicitly uses the term 'perfection' in an Emersonian way. The end is no longer a terminus or limit to be reached. . . . Not perfection as a final goal, but the ever-enduring process of perfection, maturing, refining is the aim in living. . . . Growth itself is the only moral 'end.'(177) Growth is perfection; and perfection is perfecting. This echoes Emerson's message, 'Success treads on every right step' ('AMS,' 46); and his use of the natural metaphor of a rose: 'There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence . . . [Man] cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time' ('SR,' 141). Like Emerson and Cavell, Dewey does not reject our natural sense of happiness (and shame) as the ingredient of such perfection. He does, however, emphasize that happiness is not 'a fixed attainment' but resides in the process of searching—'succeeding, getting forward, moving in advance' (RP, 179–80)" (62).

standards and patterns in what has gone before. The mind may be regarded as a group of contents resulting from having certain things presented. In this case, the earlier presentations constitute the material to which the later are to be assimilated. Emphasis upon the value of the early experiences of immature beings is most important, especially because of the tendency to regard them as of little account. But these experiences do not consist of externally presented material, but of interaction of native activities with the environment which progressively modifies both the activities and the environment. ...Isolated from their connection with the present environment in which individuals have to act, they become a kind of rival and distracting environment. Their value lies in their use to increase the meaning of the things with which we have actively to do at the present time. (*DE*, 84-85)

We (who were not educated in a Deweyan system) readily empathize with Plato's chained cave-dwellers, as they helplessly track shadows on the wall, not primarily through realizing our allegiance to the sensible over the intelligible but rather because of our time in school. Out of this instituted darkness, always looming as the background of our intellect, Emerson drops his "hints" for their use during daylight. These hints commence in response to our shared plight as students of history, past and present.

There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has be-fallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent. (*TCRWE* II, 3)

Without understanding these hints as such with an awareness of Emerson's critique of passive commentary (retrospection, empiricism), this initial opening to "History" will sound utterly foreign to what we normally comprehend as history.

This foreignness is an integral part of its purpose. Nothing sounds more ahistorical, in the sense of an absolute metaphysics beyond space and time, than the statement, “There is one mind common to all individual men.” The empiricist within us will interpret this “one mind,” perhaps, as a globular infrastructure upon which rests singular windows on the world, as if we were each an individual facet on the eye of a great bee.

Notice, however, with the advantage of reading it on the basis of Emerson’s critique of empiricism, even this simple paragraph moves us into an engagement with history “from the inside.” The vantage shifts to the singular facet rather than the encompassing eye, so that “every man is an inlet to the same.” From within this facet-inlet, not the protoplasmic interior of common substance but rather the “the right of reason” (where we hear both as the propriety of reason and as the inalienable right of its possession) engages us. In taking over this right, we will become emancipated from darkness (the bondage of retrospection) and will each gain the status of a “freeman of the whole estate,” which implies that we may wander about it at liberty. We can infer that reason as a “whole estate” is not merely a structureless mass but rather an articulated expanse, a domain in which we move freely but also a domain that keeps us free through allowing us ordered possibilities of locution. In so moving within, we can also relocate elsewhere within the whole, which implies that we can also transport ourselves into the other facet-inlets. Therein, we can encounter differences of apprehension: thinking what Plato has thought, feeling what a saint has felt, understanding what has befallen anyone,

living historical difference from a reasoning interior. Indeed, this “universal mind” is not the actuality of a globular substance but rather the possibility of “all that is or can be done” and thought and felt, a space of reason that we projectively inhabit. As “the only and sovereign agent,” this space provides individual agency with its being, and yet, as possibility, it has no more being than the individual agency it upholds.

The empiricist within us will not have understood this on an initial reading. She will make no sense of rational possibility whatsoever, since rational possibility could never fund an impression, passively perceived by the mind. Even for someone like Hume, for whom the mind constructs the world through chained association, even as it constructs itself, this mind cannot encounter the world except through a strict determinism, one whose attribution is governed ostensibly by psychological habit but really by the exclusion of freedom *qua* possibility *a priori*. Just as Hume both excludes causation as a real power and yet re-inscribes it as the (materialist) organizing principle that binds any narrative concerning the world, he likewise re-inscribes it as the (materialist) organizing principle that binds any narrative concerning the mind. According to Hume from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*,

We have sought in vain for an idea of power or necessary connexion, in all the sources from which we could suppose it to be derived. It appears, that, in single instances of the operation of bodies, we never can, by our utmost scrutiny, discover any thing but one event following another; without being able to comprehend any force or power, by which the cause operates, or any connexion between it and its supposed effect. The same difficulty occurs in contemplating the operations of mind on

body; where we observe the motion of the latter to follow upon the volition of the former; but are not able to observe or conceive the tie, which binds together the motion and volition, or the energy by which the mind produces this effect. The authority of the will over its own faculties and ideas is not a whit more comprehensible: So that, upon the whole, there appears not, throughout all nature, any one instance of connexion, which is conceivable by us. All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem conjoined, but never connected. And as we can have no idea of any thing, which never appeared to our outward sense or inward sentiment, the necessary conclusion seems to be, that we have no idea of connexion or power at all, and that these words are absolutely without any meaning, when employed either in philosophical reasonings, or common life. (*AECHU*, 53-54)

Here, of course, Hume dictates the entire anti-idealist metaphysics of empiricism, one that will exclude any account of the enactive, projective, living subject a priori, with every account of the coherence of experience (along with its possible internal perfection). One intellectually possessed by this metaphysics will never understand the subject as giving the possibility of its own history, as it discovers itself in its past as the present projection of its future.

Likewise, the more mundane pupillary empiricist cannot conceive history as proceeding from this possibility, since her desk and her commentary habitually chain her to history's inevitability within passive reception. Thus, she will not understand, as Emerson commences,

Of the works of this mind history is the record. Its genius is illustrated by the entire series of days. Man is explicable by nothing less than all his history. Without hurry, without rest, the human spirit goes forth from the beginning to embody every faculty, every thought, every emotion, which belongs to it in appropriate events. But the thought is always prior to the fact; all the facts of history preexist in the mind as

laws. Each law in turn is made by circumstances predominant, and the limits of nature give power to but one at a time. (*TCRWE* II, 3)

The empiricist will take “This mind” to designate an empty metaphysical impossibility, rather than finding it to open onto possibility itself. She will understand “all his history” as if this history were the submerged part of an iceberg supporting the tip of a present human being, rather than the imminent possibility of intelligent living, the “genius” of historical being, with which she is always already immanently engaged. We encounter any historical being within Emersonian history on the horizon of its reasons for existence; the thought of this being “prior to the fact,” with that being-as-object *post factum* understood as subject to laws given power to explain its concrete existence. Another way of saying this is that the historical object, whether human or acorn, never appears apart from the subject’s engagement with it (as “the human spirit goes forth”) within a field of rational possibility. The explanation of this object by this subject, whether positioning it relative to other subjects and objects within a rational nexus or determining its movement in relation to a predictive end, is a function of this engagement, not a relationship established by an interior (passive) subject between exterior (passive) objects.

Emerson proclaims, “This human mind wrote history, and this must read it. The Sphinx must solve her own riddle. If the whole of history is in one man, it is all to be explained from individual experience” (3). Since she will not glean the meaning of this “one mind,” in its productive inscription of history, neither will the empiricist apprehend this same mind in its involvement with reading what it has

written. She will not gather the sharing of destinies, in both senses of the word sharing, as co-inhabiting and as communicating, since for her, either every soul is separate, awash in an alien succession of tides, or else there are no souls, only islands of interpretation. She will not understand, for instance, what Frederick Douglass asks of his listeners in the great address of 1852 recorded as “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” When Douglass orates this speech to the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, he attempts to enter the perspectives of his listeners, however improbable this seems, and he entreats them to enter his, however improbable this seems:

I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. — The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. (*LWFD* 5)

In this speech, we find Douglass reading his audience in the context of American history, Douglass reading his own history, Douglass providing his own history for reading by the audience, and our own reading of both Douglass and the silent women in his audience. For the empiricist, in relating to this history of an event, since there are only passively received facts, including facts of perception and audition, none of this “reading” takes place, if reading involves the understanding of thought. For her, there are, at best, grouped, historically formed narratives that some can share but not all, where incommensurability cuts rigid borders, and at

worst, there are only singularities, atomized vantages, perhaps no vantages at all, from which communication and construction are indistinguishable. She will lay stress on Douglass's "immeasurable distances," to the point where these distances break into unbridgeable abysses. But when Douglass says, "The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me," he assumes that he and his listeners share the same sunlight (both of the sun and its metaphor of American liberty), despite the refraction of this light in a *Pharmakon*-like manner. He also assumes that these polar consequences, "life and healing" and "stripes and death," speak in a universal language of health and suffering (the general possibilities of human life). In reading his speech from this Emersonian vantage, we find Douglass reasoning together with us and his audience, even as he carefully demarcates the great divides that we must overcome.

For Emerson, such gathering-in-reasoning takes place in all historical and transpersonal relations as the human mind speaking to itself. In delivering his speech, Douglass does not intend to do what the empiricist takes him to accomplish (to place an utter sphinxlike abyss at the heart of understanding), since if this were the case, his speech would be futile, and he would not deliver it at all. The empiricist will find in his words a perpetual war of biological and social and subjective identities, rather than engaged communion within a projective expanse, even if this expanse is littered with dangerous obstacles and frightening occlusions. Though Douglass does not make explicit the projection of shared ends, particularly infinite, with his communicative event (since he addresses the ordinary listener and

not the philosophical empiricist), such shared ends animate, from an illuminated Emersonian perspective, the orchestration of the whole. Douglass, of course, was not a transcendental idealist, whether Kantian or Emersonian, and yet, we can find within his practical idealism, idealism as understood in the more prosaic utopian sense, a resonance with Emerson's account of the projective life of the spirit.⁴⁸

We hear the empiricist within us say, "No one that was not subject to slavery themselves could understand the perspective of an emancipated slave from 1852, not the wealthy white women whom Douglass addressed then and certainly not the bourgeoisie readers from our time." Or even, we may hear her announce, "Further, we could never 'reason ourselves' towards a shared perspective with Douglass, since we could never translate the suffering of a racially-dominated body in a time of terror into rational terms that were not themselves tools of domination." When

48. In *Frederick Douglass and the Fourth of July*, James A. Colaiaco quotes Douglass as he frames this projective life in the following manner: "Before proceeding with his narration of the highlights of the American Revolution of 1776, Douglass declared that America was not beyond redemption. It was not too late for the nation to fulfill its promise. There was hope because 'your nation is so young.... You are, even now, only in the beginning of your national career, still lingering in the period of childhood.' He continued: "There is hope in the thought, and hope is much needed, under the dark clouds which lower above the horizon. The eye of the reformer is met with angry flashes portending disastrous times; but his heart may well beat lighter at the thought that America is young, and that she is still in the impressionable stage of her existence" (38).

Emerson says, “What befell Asdrubal⁴⁹ or Caesar Borgia⁵⁰ is as much an illustration of the mind’s powers and depravations as what has befallen us,” how does he imagine that we might share in the singular feats, the singular horrors, and the cultural-historical differences with which these cases confront us? (*TCRWE* II, 4)

We can take this apparently rhetorical question, however, and transform it into a real one, noting that we too bleed, fear death, summon courage, encounter despair, court destruction, and we do all of these things in the projection of ends and the judgment of objects, no differently than Douglass or Hasdrubal. Why not, rather than keeping these alien cases as inert black boxes to be put on a shelf and held at a distance from engaged empathy, would we not endeavor to engage their history and make it our own, seeing how far we can allow their suffering (and hopeful and violent and ambivalent) experiences to project our own ends and objects? The error of our interior retrospective empiricist is that she understands these historical relations as the receptions of impressed identities, bleakly held apart by historical forces, rather as differences to be overcome within moving projects of identification.

In an Emersonian spirit, we can counterpose a question: does this internal empiricist, the master of retrospection, even understand her own perspective?

From a strictly Humean empiricist standpoint, the self quite literally cannot

49. Hasdrubal, the Carthaginian general, ran into battle during his army’s retreat and was promptly beheaded by the Romans, his head delivered in a sack to Hannibal, his brother.

50. During a siege, Borgia outran his own army and encountered a group of Navarrian knights who fatally speared him and stripped his corpse.

understand itself, since it can assign no cause to the procession of impressions beyond the internal narratival ordering of those impressions themselves: anything resembling Cartesian self-substance as an object of knowledge vanishes from the scene, as does self-identity over time. If, as such an empiricist, I attempt to “reason myself towards my own self,” then this reasoning could only amount to a form of manipulative violence against the flow of ideas. Our inner empiricist, however, disavows self-knowledge in a more important way for Emerson, since she only attempts to know herself through (retrospective) introspection, rather than knowing herself through the making explicit of her own intelligence by acting and thinking in her own name, an acting and thinking that always resonates with the reason of history.

For Emerson, therefore, she stands as “a Sphinx who must solve her own riddle.” This metaphor does not imply that I find myself as a problem to be solved but rather that, in my present state, the riddle that I pose to myself is in principle unsolvable, and, thus, I must fundamentally change my orientation (awaken from darkness and sleep), so that the (historical) knowledge of myself can first become possible. A Sphinx, beyond the complex etiology of this creature in Greek myth and even in Oedipus’ story in Sophocles, was also for Emerson (as it remains for us) a mysterious figure, animal and human, carved into dead wind-worn Egyptian stone. Our riddle for ourselves is that we pose questions to ourselves, as we would to the living Oedipus, when we are not yet (or no longer) alive. How can an inert being, one whose relations to itself and everything past and future are themselves inert,

know its own history? In order to do so, that thing would have to wake up, knowing itself in the process.⁵¹

Emerson implements the following rhetorical strategy in “History’s” odd opening: because of our passive relation to our historical being, one inculcated not only through our ideas but also through our concrete historical education itself, we must be shocked out of inertia. The move out of inertia and into historical reasoning being (which is also the uncovering of the selves that we already were, from beneath the cloth that has draped our understanding) does not happen automatically. It must be provoked. This is part of the function of the provocative ministerial direct address in Emerson’s essays, but we see this provocation in “History” take the form of a poetic reverie, wherein Emerson reveals what he has been doing only after he has been adequately misunderstood.⁵² The voice that

51. Later in “History,” the Sphinx will reappear, precisely in the figure of alien stone brought to life: “Belzoni digs and measures in the mummy-pits and pyramids of Thebes, until he can see the end of the difference between the monstrous work and himself. When he has satisfied himself, in general and in detail, that it was made by such a person as he, so armed and so motivated, and to ends to which he himself should also have worked, the problem is solved; his thought lives along the whole line of temples and sphinxes and catacombs, passes through them all with satisfaction, and they live again to the mind, or are now.” (*TCRWE II*, 7) So not only are “the temples and sphinxes and catacombs” brought to “live again in the mind,” they do so only through Belzoni’s engaged activity (digging, measuring), until he finds works that are resonate with his own work, made in the service of “ends to which he himself should also have worked.” The difference between the monstrous and Belzoni collapses not merely in his making the alien object alive, but also in his becoming less monstrous himself through engaging in an intelligent human project.

52. Andrea Knutson analogizes Emerson’s requirement for experimental reading: testing—failure, reformulation, and retesting—precisely on the model of concrete investigation in the sciences. She states, “Anyone who ‘reads’ Emerson

speaks to us with utter self-certainty of “one mind,” flowing through Shakespeare and Solomon and “a slip of a boy” announces what its speaker has heard prophetically, imply that he has seen something transcendent that we have not, and this functions not to make us take what he says as empirical or metaphysical doctrine but rather to allow its strange light to expose our shadows as such, attempting to elicit us to squint towards its vision. (*TCRWE* II, 5)

C. On Emerson’s Idealism

Here, though we have moved from the first paragraph of Emerson’s *Nature* into his essay “History,” we have travelled where he has taken us, since in apparent paradox, *Nature* begins with a discussion of history rather than its named topic. Like any poetic writer, Emerson deals in the unexpected, and he brings the reader into meandering chains of association rather than into linear arguments and presentations. In the terms of what I have discussed above, the idealist philosopher of spontaneity makes explicit the projective activity of the “I.” She does so through A.) displaying the inner vacuity of empiricism and B.) formalizing the relation between the subject and its object or end in order to allow one to think “inside” the animating activity that holds this relation in place. Although this philosophical

understands how his sentences force his audience into a certain mode of experiencing his ideas that disrupt familiar reading habits. One needs, in the spirit of the “metaphorizing power,” to figure them out, as it were. One cannot read them in the standard linear fashion. Instead, his audience must become habituated to a thinking process enacting the process of discovery described by Reed and Herschel—becoming readers/natural philosophers who turn to their powers of reasoning and imagination to make meaning out of what often feels like the chaos of his sentences” (119).

making-explicit is not mechanically or mathematically linear, like a theorem or proof, it follows the ancient Platonic logic of the movement of thoughtful vision as it transcends the sensible realm. It requires, furthermore, a certain knowledge of the history of thought losing itself, for instance in skepticism and dogmatism, and it (re-)enacts the overcoming of these losses to address (ever-)present distortions in thought.

I designate Emerson a writer of spontaneity because Emerson's writing, at least somewhat, participates in this philosophical activity, an activity in our time that we cannot dissociate from (the inheritance of) idealism. In Emerson, however, we find no progression up Diotima's ladder of *Eros*, no ascension up the divided line, no regression towards an unmoved mover, no tracing backwards along the links of the chain of being, no proof of the priority of thinking to being, no deduction of the fundamental categories of mind or language, and no progressive logic that allows thought to enter into and comprehend the history of its being. Emerson's writing, for instance in its beginning *Nature* with history and "History" with an apparent ahistorical solipsism, is, at best, haphazard from a philosophical vantage. One, particularly the empiricist (always in us), might be tempted to say this because Emerson's writing opposes philosophy, interrupts philosophy from within, eviscerates philosophy through exposing it to its poetic outside, inscribes philosophy within material history, or replaces philosophy with a poetized thinking beyond it, yet none of these things are true. There is no general critique of philosophy within Emerson's work, only general respect for philosophy. This is so primarily not

because Emerson holds figures such as Plato and Kant in high regard (although he does) but rather because he shares in their revelatory ends of exposing the truth of reason.

We can only regard Emerson's writing within his great essays, because of its twists, (dis)associations, metaphors, lyrical reveries, and performative subtleties, as poetic writing or even as a form of poetry. It is no mystery that poetry, insofar as it can enfold any mode of speaking or thinking, can enfold philosophy within it, miming for a time the movements of its thinking. Emerson's relation to idealism in his writing, however, is more resonant and complementary than mimetic: it is not as if he seeks to contain philosophy's power or usurp its role so much as to work together with it. Work together with it towards what? Perhaps we can acknowledge the conventional division between poetry as the unsystematic and philosophy as the systematic through noting that the difference between Emerson's writing and the writing of philosophy is the lack of system within his work. The imperative towards the systematic always conditions philosophical thought, even when philosophy disavows its own systematic nature: Emerson's work is too unsystematic even for such a dialectical disavowal. The similarity between Emerson's work and the work of philosophy, however, lies in both of their commitments to the restoration of thoughtful life in the advent of its (always threatened) loss. But this means that Emerson's work, precisely because it does not engage thought by virtue of system (for instance, as Rödl engages various forms of philosophical empiricism through a recovery of idealism within the practice of

linguistic analysis), will have to restore this thoughtful life by other thoughtful means, involving more concretized, singular, idiosyncratic deployments of language to direct his readers past equally concretized, singular, idiosyncratic moments of thought's darkening.⁵³

Empiricism, for Rödl involves the (hypocritical) theoretical separation of the subject from its own engaged immanence in the projection of its objects and ends, which means that this subject distorts its distinctively human cognitive life through disavowing its own self-consciousness while living it. This is no small problem. The (self-)characterization of subjectivity as a passive receptacle or as non-existent, first, is not merely “a philosophical idea.” This empiricist mode of thinking animates much of contemporary philosophical discourse, shaping the intellectual interests and the direction of energies of some of the brightest people in the world, effectively allowing a significant repository of the intellect to turn against itself: projecting, living thinking attempting to ground itself either within the inert immanence of conscious experience or the equally inert immanence of material reduction. This is not as apocalyptic as it sounds, since even in doing such things, these individuals

53. Elizabeth Peabody makes a similar point in her 1838 review: “Minds of the highest order of genius draw their thoughts most immediately from the Supreme Mind, which is the fountain of all finite natures. And hence they clothe the truths they see and feel, in those forms of nature which are generally intelligible to all ages of the world. With this poetic instinct, they have a natural tendency to withdraw from the conventions of their own day; and strive to forget, as much as possible, the arbitrary associations created by temporary institutions and local peculiarities” (319-321). In withdrawing from the idiosyncrasy of “temporary institutions and local peculiarities,” the poet must create other idiosyncrasies and peculiarities that yet communicate something that should be generally intelligible, in a paradoxical mode of singularized universality.

remain engaged with thought and life, teaching others to live and think through their embodied examples, even if they spend a preponderance of their intellectual being disavowing their own engaged cognition.

Certain philosophical ideas and modes of argumentation, though, are not merely contained within texts and talking heads in disciplinary enclosures. Philosophical empiricism, distilled in various ways, spreads far and wide. For instance, the famous essay by Thomas Nagel “What it is like to be a Bat?” (which works directly from an empiricist type 1 theory of passive, mysterious consciousness) informs the discussion of consciousness in areas such as empirical psychology and animal rights discourse. According to Nagel, when we try to understand the experience of a creature such as a bat,

The more different from oneself the other experiencer is, the less success one can expect with this enterprise. In our own case we occupy the relevant point of view, but we will have as much difficulty understanding our own experience properly if we approach it from another point of view as we would if we tried to understand the experience of another species without taking up its point of view. This bears directly on the mind-body problem. For if the facts of experience-facts about what it is like for the experiencing organism-are accessible only from one point of view, then it is a mystery how the true character of experiences could be revealed in the physical operation of that organism. (“WLBB,” 442)

For the idealist, however, there are no such things as “facts of experience about what it is like for the experiencing organism” or a “true character of experiences,” if these phrases imply that there are any discoverable entities associated with

experience as such.⁵⁴ For this idealist, experience “as such” has a form, not a content, and one makes explicit this form in movements of self-consciousness.⁵⁵ There is nothing that “it is like to be a bat,” because bats cannot have experience because they cannot have self-consciousness because they cannot use a language that would give their experience an articulable form. In creating his comparison, Nagel radically misunderstands human experience as an animalic impression, leaving us with a false idea of both human and animal awareness.

Furthermore, even though Nagel’s essay involves (relatively) abstract philosophical theory presented in a (relatively) abstract philosophical form, Jennifer Schuessler, in an article in the *New York Times*, has shown that Nagel’s work has been widely endorsed by a variety of fundamentalist creationists, despite his quite liberal political leanings (*NYT* 2013/02/07).⁵⁶ Insofar as it is read, the work of philosophy shapes intellectual lives of all sorts, and the work of (self-)distorting

54. We can see how pervasive this idea of consciousness as an inner (self-)presence through Knutson’s description of its historical expanse. She claims, “what these writers continually return to is the idea of consciousness as an “inner sense,” a view Antonio Damasio argues has been held by as diverse a group of thinkers as Locke, Kant, Freud, and William James, as well as himself” (114).

55. Robert Pollock maintains, “Emerson attributed so much independence to the human spirit in its power to apprehend nature’s deeper meanings, that at times he sounds like a subjective idealist. But his real intent is merely to stress the profound interiority of the human spirit” (*Emerson in the 21st Century*, 16). But on my reading, there is little difference between a subjective idealism and a thinker of “the profound interiority of the human spirit,” at least in comparison to a thinking of projective transcendence on the horizon of infinite objects and ends.

56. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/07/books/thomas-nagel-is-praised-by-creationists.html>

philosophy also shapes lives of all sorts, even if it does this through further distorting already distorted ones. Insofar as the philosophy of Sellars, Wittgenstein, and Rödl combat empiricism effectively within proper philosophical venues, they also give us resources to address, transform, and explicate beyond this empiricism in its diluted cultural forms.

In my reading of Emerson, I am not interested in the way in which Emerson responds to philosophical empiricism directly, because he does not. In his work, he rarely mentions empiricism, and when he does, he is merely concerned with the over-valuation of singular cases in relation to general law or possibility, not any philosophical theory. When he mentions Locke or Hume, it almost always takes the form of general praise, usually directed towards an entire list of personages in which one or the other is included, although he does once denounce the shallowness of Hume's abstractions, immediately before doing the same with Johnson's (*TCWRWE* V, 138). Emerson was not one to engage in any form of extended philosophical debate or argumentation. His work, however, continually engages and attempts to turn us from the intellectual, industrial, aesthetic, or merely indolent prioritization of the receptive/passive relation to self and world. Therefore, when I read Rödl and Emerson together, I do not mean to suggest that there is an inner Rödlian daemon within Emerson trying to burst free, nor that Rödl is secretly Emersonian, despite his proclivity for philosophical systemization (though this is probably more or less the case). Rather, I merely suggest that Rödl's work of making explicit the overcoming of philosophical empiricism provides a

hermeneutical template for both drawing out Emerson's formal, complementary resonance with the actual work of idealism, as opposed to its doctrinal expression, as well as allowing us to see structural patterns and relatively coordinated strategies (of explication as reorientation) within Emerson's improvisational writing. As I have argued, these patterns and strategies resonate with the work of philosophical idealism because they share similar ends of drawing active human self-consciousness from out of its self-disavowal.

Thus, to return to *Nature* from "History," we find Emerson prefiguring, if not the Sphinx from that essay, then at least its primordial language (from the Egyptian sphinx that prefigured the Greek sphinx), in the lines almost immediately following its opening:

Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth. In like manner, nature is already, in its forms and tendencies, describing its own design. Let us interrogate the great apparition, that shines so peacefully around us. Let us inquire, to what end is nature? (*TCRWE* I, 7)

If I am an image inscribed in stone, if that is my initial condition, then this image would have to come alive and move in order for it to discover what it is an image of, and, hence, to know itself as an "I," so that I can recognize it as my life. For this to happen, I would have to shift my understanding of myself from merely being a body in the world or a collection of perceptions (a literal or figurative "eye") and discover myself in my characteristic engagements with objects and ends, thus (re-)placing my image within the pupillary circle of human life. Likewise, and it is important that Emerson makes the interrogation of nature an analogue of self-discovery, if am

to know nature, then I must encounter it as similarly alive, which implies it too must be brought (for me) out of dead passivity and returned to the land of the living.

How are we, however, to encounter a living nature, when we have worked so hard to make it die? When Emerson says that “nature is already, in its forms and tendencies, describing its own design,” then does this not lead us back into supernatural mystification of natural processes? This phrase is more difficult than it appears, though, since in earlier metaphysical/theological understandings, when nature “describes its own design,” then this design that it describes is one that God already imprinted within it through his creation: nature unfolds intelligibly because it was intelligently made, and the “forms and tendencies” apprehended with it are ultimately emblem of the transcendent divine. Emerson does not say this here, however, speaking merely of nature “describing its own design,” which literally implies that nature designs and creates itself as spontaneous being. What that would mean in this context is not entirely clear, and it is perhaps meant as a debt to be honored in the coming sections. This unclarity itself is a sort of disclosive strategy, one of which Emerson is fond to the point of being overly fond: the gnomic statement that encloses the enigmatic question that portends the profound answer yet to be revealed, positioned as a dramatic locus of hope. How could nature, in describing its own design, create itself as God creates Himself and the remainder of the world? Even here, however, Emerson does not leave us stranded, since he goes on to describe nature not in itself but rather in relation to us, insofar as it manifests

to us as “the great apparition.” When he concludes, “Let us inquire, to what end nature?”, we are to hear this “end” ambiguously, both as the end of nature itself, the self-revelation towards which it is propelled in its forms and tendencies” and as the end to which we assign nature in our subjective apprehension of it.

The typically modern scientific way to collapse this ambiguity of the purposive being of nature is to claim that its end is nothing other than our own. This is to say that nature has no proper end, that it is only an inert material object in the scope of our comprehension. In this view, we find the paradigmatic form of empiricism: we passively receive the impression of the utterly passive (dead) object, to reconstruct it as we wish. The question Emerson implicitly poses here is one concerning how we can keep the question of the “end of nature” as a real one and, therefore, hold the ambiguity of its end in place. One significant thought here, itself a promissory note, is that when I think myself “inside” the circling projection of the object on the horizon of the space of reasons, I do not only think “myself” immanently within the giving and asking for reasons: nature draws me forth to respond to it, even as I perpetually decide upon my response and, thus, upon who I am in relation to nature. Insofar as, to put this in a practically Heidegger-like form, the circle circles, this means that the object always appears for me as meaningful or relevant: on the horizon of ends.

Precisely because Emerson attempts to make idealism explicit in a poetic form (and this also means he attempts to move consciousness towards a poetized self-consciousness, since these are the same thing), he often sounds like a proto-

Heidegger. Heidegger offers a joining locus for this interpretation of Emerson, since Rödl quotes Heidegger and is obviously familiar with his work, often using Heideggerian formulations, while Heidegger often employs idealist-like strategies in his making explicit, not of consciousness but of the structures of Dasein and the dispensations of being. For instance, in “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger finds the human and the space in which she dwells co-involved, rather than existing separately, alienated into the actively representing and the passively received:

When we speak of the human and space, it sounds as though the human stood on one side, space on the other. Yet space is not something that faces the human. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are humans, and over and above them space; for when I say “a human,” and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner— that is, who dwells— then by the name “human,” I already name the stay within the fourfold among things. Even when we relate ourselves to those things that are not in our immediate reach, we are staying with the things themselves. We do not represent distant things merely in our mind— as the textbooks have it— so that only mental representations of distant things run through our minds and heads as substitutes for the things. (*BW*, 358)

Of course, Heidegger’s fourfold is not the encircling projection of the subject in its living forth towards knowledge and ends, exactly, but it is not not this subject either, since Heidegger determines the human and its horizon in the wake of different questions from Rödl. But Heidegger’s formulation does bear a poetic trace of the living subject of idealism, a subject already traced in Emerson’s account of its circling nature:

The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world.

St. Augustine described the nature of God as a circle whose centre was everywhere, and its circumference nowhere. . . .Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth, that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens. . . .This fact, as far as it symbolizes the moral fact of the Unattainable, the flying Perfect, around which the hands of man can never meet, at once the inspirer and the condemner of every success, may conveniently serve us to connect many illustrations of human power in every department. (*TCRWE* II, 179)

Heidegger presents his circling relations of the fourfold in a more morally neutral tone, whereas Emerson emphasizes the perfecting projection of ends.⁵⁷ Yet both stress what might be called the inner connectedness of being in the world, a connectedness that is most profoundly evinced through the articulations of idealism. According to this formulation, because nature is encircled together with the subject, for Emerson here is no such thing as a relation to the dead material object that I then must construct an ad hoc purpose for, as if life in nature always involves absolute instrumentalism. We encounter all things on the horizon of their

57. In *Poetry and Pragmatism*, Richard Poirier glosses Emerson's circles in the following way: "Circles' in Emerson are equivalent to what are now sometimes referred to as 'discursive formations' . . . an Emersonian "circle," like a Foucauldian "discursive formation," actively creates truths and knowledge and then subtly enforces their distribution. It follows that truths and systems of knowledge are to be viewed as in themselves contingent, like other convenient fictions, and scarcely the worse, if you are an Emersonian pragmatist, for being so. It is fictions that give us hope. Among those forms of knowledge or truth created by an Emersonian "circle" is knowledge by any individual of its sense of identity and selfhood, along with the language by which that self is codified or becomes articulate" (22-23). On my reading, I see Emerson's idealism as a precursor not to pragmatism but rather to a sophisticated analytic idealism that articulates the perpetual revolutions of infinite projection. Therefore, these circles hold something more profound about human ends and the human possibility of perfection than could be expressed through the contingency of "discursive formations."

projection towards unity within the space of reasons. If I think that nature is a “dead object,” then I find myself within the distortions of empiricism, needing to remember the movement of self-consciousness in/as being.

Emerson’s writing, however, is nowhere near this discursive, operating with innuendos rather than arguments. And yet, in the third paragraph in *Nature*, he will state, “Whenever a true theory [of nature] appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test is, that it will explain all phenomena” (*TCRWE* I, 8). This directly implies that there is no external relation between theory constructed by the subject and the external object as the target of explanation. If this were so, then there would not be the possibility of a “theory be[ing] its own evidence,” since from the vantage of empiricism, evidence for a theory’s truth comes from without, in the form of confirming or verifying subsequent impressions, not from within that theory itself. This construction is a statement of a coherentism wherein the goal of inquiry is not to make theory approximate the external world but rather to make descriptions of the world (for the subject) cohere with other descriptions of the world (for the subject). Such statements commit Emerson to inhabiting the realm of the idealist circle, because they imply that thought speaks with itself and its world within an intimate dance of perfection.

In this evaluation of Emerson and his poetic-strategic relation to empiricism, I have sometimes spoken in extremes, situating him in terms of an absolute difference between intellectual and lived empiricism: the passivity of theoretically receptive knowledge versus the passivity of a disengaged, overly conservative,

overly spectatorial mode of living in the world. For human beings as living intellectuals, however, the poles of this divide are functionally interconnected within a complicated dynamic. We find ourselves moving between argument and action, naturally enough, because our life is an interplay between the knowing of objects and the striving for ends. Sometimes, thus, what would constitute moving out of distortion involves moving from an intellectual sphere (altering intellectual self-consciousness) to a personal sphere (altering our engagement with the living world); for instance, allowing an intellectual-philosophical problem to be solved with a the undertaking of a different practice of being in the world.

D. Solitude

We can see this nowhere more clearly than in the transition from the last paragraph of Nature's introductory chapter and the opening of its first chapter "Nature," where the one moves into the other as from ephemeral promise into loving fulfillment. The chapter "Nature" begins with an imperative towards the fully enacted engagement between the active subject and the natural world that is its object: "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars" (*TCRWE* I, 8). In these brief lines, we already have a vision of the progressive movement of the subject.

First, we have the presupposition of a movement that has already taken place, whereby I have retreated from society into my private chamber. In order to retire from my chamber, I must already have retired to it. Insofar as "retiring"

allows for a certain sort of solitude, even though it cannot be our final end, retiring into a chamber already represents a certain minimal attempt at progress.

Otherwise, why would it be mentioned? Why, however, would withdrawal from society (even if it is merely into a chamber in order to read or sleep) count as progress, if this progress is supposed to be analogous to the movement from passive retrospective history into active lived history? Just as Emerson has previously understood such retrospective practices as biography and the construction of tombs as inflected with empiricism, here he understands social relations in their negative dimension, insofar as they can deprive the self of its active being. I have already had the occasion to mention the social positioning through which industrializing education places the subject in assigned stationary desks in order to receive information passively, with that subject becoming more passive herself at every moment during this process. There are so many instances of such pacification of the subject that happen in its everyday social life that it would be an insuperable problem to list them all: standing in line, confinement within vehicles (whether carriages or cars), being ordered to stare incessantly at printed pages (in Emerson's time) or at glowing screens (increasingly in ours) for the accomplishment of social work, etc. Similarly, as Descartes had to withdraw into his bread oven in order to properly meditate, to think from his own foundations rather than from given dogma, we often must withdraw into sequestered solitude in order to escape the pervasive propaganda of the social world, as it forms us according to various political orders that are never quite our own. Withdrawing into one's chamber does

not represent a divorce from the social but rather an interruption of its destruction of our capacity for subjective solitude, a destruction whereby it is always imminently in the process of destroying itself. Going into one's chamber, supposing that one does not carry the phone screen of social indoctrination along, already amounts to an achievement.

But withdrawing into a chamber, even when doing so alone, is perhaps too social in this negative sense of the term. This is not because dialectically private chambers are always already social, precisely because the public-private distinction is already a social one but rather because private chambers, like stationary desks and prison cells, bear a substantial power for subjective pacification. Being alone is not enough for active subjective engagement in the projection of objects and ends to become fully self-conscious, since in order for this to happen, I have to be drawn outside of myself and towards the objects and ends that sustain me as I sustain them, within active encircling bursts. Familiar walls and a familiar chair in front of a familiar fire do not engage me as myself; rather, they put me to rest in my assigned sleeping quarters, either figuratively, in the zoned daydreaming of resting life or literally, as the day vanishes, and I merely dream. We might think that reading and writing in private would allow for an appropriately active indoor solitude, but Emerson skeptically maintains that even while I remain active alone inside, "I am not solitary whilst I read and write," perhaps hearing the danger of the call to order even within these characteristic practices of isolated engagement

(with requirements of editing, reporting on what one has read, the need for achievement, etc. hovering as perpetual threats).

Therefore, Emerson prompts us to retreat even further, into the paradigmatic instance of looking at the stars, where we assume that this looking does not take place in the context of an astronomical convention but rather simply when one is alone, walking or standing, gazing at the night sky. This gazing, whereby the eye becomes the I, where my hieroglyph life becomes read as living, requires an utter turning from subjective entrapment. I will commence with the discussion of this turning in the next section. Now, however, let us return to that point even before we have withdrawn into our chamber, as we were already ensnared in our negatively social exterior. Emerson situates the closing paragraph in the introduction to *Nature*, before the opening of its chapter “Nature,” in the most remote place from either solitude or the stars:

Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. In enumerating the values of nature and casting up their sum, I shall use the word in both senses; — in its common and in its philosophical import. In inquiries so general as our present one, the inaccuracy is not material; no confusion of thought will occur. Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. Art is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture. But his operations taken together are so insignificant, a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing, that in an impression so grand as that of the world on the human mind, they do not vary the result. (*TCRWE* I, 8)

This entry into the space of the “philosophical definition” represents an utter tumble back into the cave of retrospection, relinquishing even the modest gains

wherein Emerson has moved from deadening retrospection to pure wonder at the being of “language, sleep, madness, dreams, beasts, sex” in the space of a few sentences (*TCRWE* I, 8). When Emerson defines nature as the “not me” in this paragraph, synthesizing the ordinary definition of nature as the natural world and the more proper philosophical definition of nature as the purely external object, whether artificial or natural, he provides nothing for us to encounter, no obstacle to overcome, and nothing to significant engage with when we read. Here, Emerson enters the realm of the purely retrospective, critical-social concept, the very essence of something inscribed in a dictionary. As we have seen, from the very opening of the next section, this definition will have practically nothing to do with nature as Emerson approaches it in the remainder of the work. Instead, as he says it is, this paragraph provides an understanding of nature (“as I understand it”) that stands in pure abstraction, almost as if no subject had ever stood in its midst.

This movement into the concept provides for another instance of an Emersonian shock, this time not in unadulterated engagement without the comprehension of loss but rather in the yielding to the desire for philosophical conceptualization, one which in its definitive clarity loses what it seeks. To withdraw from one’s chamber (and the reading and writing there) in order to look at the stars would involve also seeing the danger of the concept, even if that concept must be utilized to make clear what we are supposed to notice. The problem is twofold. First, the separation of the subject (me) and the object (not me) is precisely what Emerson is attempting to overcome, and, thus, there is a passive empiricism

inscribed within this formulation. We can only imagine that this is put forward as a problem for us to overcome, almost as if the voice of a sophist interlocutor had intruded into Emerson's essay. Second, the voice of this formulation performs this passivity, through relating to subjects and objects with clear demarcating divisions, losing the actively figurative language, losing the circle of engagement, displaying the alien divide, across which we passively apprehend, even while conceptually demarcating this very divide.

At such a juncture, we find the writing of spontaneity divided within itself, not quite knowing what to do. If this writing were to stay within a philosophical register, which Emerson's here does not, then that would require this writing to twist itself philosophically from the mode of philosophical representation in order to show what resides beyond this representation, as Rödl does when the "I" that gets "referred to" within subjective articulation ceases to be a passive object and becomes revealed as a floating operator in the enaction of reasoning (as does its object).⁵⁸ In his poetic writing, with its movements of shock and transformation and overcoming disavowal and inundation, Emerson sets himself towards making explicit the losses

58. In her excellent *Less Legible Meanings*, Pamela Schirmeister makes a similar point: "Emerson's writing throughout bears the stamp of theoretical idealism, including its roots in Kantian thought, without, however, in the least its will to systematization or discursivity and, to some minds, its rigor. We might read this as Emerson's failure as a metaphysician; however, it may equally evidence his understanding that the self-realization of the human—of the scholar—lay not in philosophy as such but in poetry, or, more precisely, in the unification of poetry and philosophy called for by both Carlyle and Schlegel. Such a unification would, to a philosophical eye, look aggressively antitheoretical, but this very refusal of the theoretical would itself demonstrate and be replaced by the auto-production of the subject" (42).

occurring in various concrete modes of passivity, including those found in the concrete practice of philosophical activity, and projects us towards turning those losses into gains.

E. The Perpetual Presence of the Sublime

Therefore, following Emerson, we will have travelled from the articulation of a universally social abstract definition into our being tranfixed by a higher firmament, being held within a deeper solitude by the shining of a star. Emerson's solitude beyond or before that of the lonely chamber reminds us of, is perhaps inspired by, the opening of Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," wherein "steep and lofty cliffs" on a "wild secluded scene/ Impress thoughts of a more deep seclusion; and connect the landscape with the quiet of the sky" (*Lyrical Ballads* 201-202).⁵⁹ In Rödl's idealist projection of self-consciousness, we found an articulation of subjective transcendence, as it moved beyond passive reception of objects and into the enacted engagement with the infinite, towards the perfection of ultimate truths and goods. This transcendence does not project towards an unknowable Platonic heaven but rather towards the immanently knowing unification of human life, as it exists through the movement of self-perfection (in the unities of truths and ends). Rödl's reorientation of the

59. In his biography *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Oliver Wendell Holmes notes, "No writer is more deeply imbued with the spirit of Wordsworth than Emerson, as we cannot fail to see in turning the pages of "Nature," his first thoroughly characteristic essay" (92). The elucidation of Emerson via Wordsworth is, thus, not fortuitous, and furthermore, because of their resonance, both can be elucidated through the lens of a more contemporary idealism.

philosophical intellect, though necessarily abstract, ushers that intellection beyond even the greater distorting abstraction of empiricism that breaks the circle of projective life into subjects divided from objects or even divided from themselves. We can see the work of both Wordsworth and Emerson flowing in a similar idealist vein, projecting engagement from out of retrospective loss, but the modalities of their poetic projection more resemble stumbles and leaps towards the concretion of life than they do the geometrical oscillations and progressions of critique and dialectic.

For instance, as he unfolds his images of transcending seclusion, Wordsworth does not exactly direct the reader towards the subjective limits of nature in the encounter with the beautiful or sublime (thus allowing subjectivity to become aware of itself in its shining through everything). Instead, he carries the reader from the “lofty cliffs” to “thoughts of more deep seclusion” that immediately connect the landscape (and perhaps the horizontally inclined self in repose) with “the quiet of the sky” (*LB*, 201-202). From this sky, we fall back into repose (almost as if we had repositioned our subjective stance) “under this dark sycamore,” amidst “plots of cottage ground” and orchard tufts.” From there, almost being lost in the inarticulate immanence of nature, we spot “wreaths of smoke/ Sent up in silence” that perhaps portend “vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods” or “some Hermit’s cave, where by his fire/ The hermit sits alone.” Wordsworth places these accordion transitions between the inhuman and the human, the low the high, thought and its other, etc. not as the means through which we can encounter a transcendent (or

immanent) nature but rather as the indication of a nature that manifests for him in the spacing of these transitions. The poem began with a reported return to this scene (“again I hear/ These waters”), and after his speculation on the hermit in the cave, Wordsworth informs us he has been another sort of hermit, living in “lonely rooms and ‘mid the din/ Of towns and cities,” and yet even then had “owed” to the recollection of such scenes, to which he has now returned (*LB*, 203).

In moving us into this (perpetually) transitional space, this flowing passage between mourning and exultation and reflection and enjoyment that is the human encounter with nature (and, hence, the only nature we know), it is not as if Wordsworth does not avail himself of philosophical thought. When he makes pronouncements such as “We see into the life of things” (*LB*, 204) or speaks of “A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things” (*LB*, 207), it is not as if Wordsworth is avoiding philosophy, attempting to move into non-intellectual adoration of nature. When he articulates his famous phrase, “Of eye, and ear, —both what they half create, / And what perceive,” it is not as if this does not have a Kantian resonance wherein a divided mind knows the world it represents (*LB*, 207-208). And yet, such utterances within this poem are not (empiricist) conclusions that announce a substantial worldly spirit or a living energy or the mind’s creative emanation of the world, as if these were things among the trees. Rather, these phrases participate in the movement of the reader to the spacing (of nature) within Wordsworth’s disclosive dynamics, almost as if his words were carriages, transporting her to a time between the

memory and expectation of the natural encounter, on the circling wheel of the present.

Likewise, Emerson's entreaty for the one seeking solitude to "look at the stars" does not call for a fall into mere natural immanence. There would be no engagement and no solitude in such immanence. There are two dangers here. First, in my encounter with it, nature may overwhelm me, so that I lose any sense of self-consciousness. The "experience" of being swept down a raging river would provide a paradigmatic example. Although I would be all too alone in such a case, there would be no solitude there, since the "I" would vanish in a torrent of fear. Second, in the natural encounter, I may retreat so far into myself that the engaged object becomes determined as a mere appearance. But in this case, I do not encounter solitude qua isolation from others, since the others entirely disappear, along with the nature into which I would withdraw. A daydreaming fugue under the pines would not count as an instance of solitude in nature, since in losing the relation to anything other than appearance for the mind, I also lose the sense of myself as alone and in nature. Emerson, therefore, chooses his example of the star carefully. The star engages the subject when she sees it, drawing her towards it. At the same time, this star evinces its distance as object from the perceiver. Emerson will open the paragraph following the star's introduction with the following conclusion:

The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence.
(*TCRWE* I, 9)

A complicated dynamic unfolds in Emerson's isolating interplay with the star, as he moves towards this conclusion in his writing. This passage, however, contains within itself a microcosm of these dynamics. First, it implicitly indicates that we encounter the star, at first, under the influence of empiricism, with its language ("a kindred impression") directly drawing from the philosophical empiricist's vocabulary. The very choice of the star as object, in fact, inclines us towards empiricism, since it provides a paradigmatic example of the empirically encountered object. The star impresses its light upon us from a distance. The star is like an atom separated from all others, and I encounter the multiplicity of stars in associative constellations. My relation to the star seems fundamentally passive, since I cannot affect it. This experience of the star, however, provides a template for our encounter with "all natural objects," insofar as they make "a kindred impression." All such objects, when we hold a passively receptive relation to them, appear as "present" but "inaccessible."

On the one hand, these objects appear as given to the subject, emanating towards it as presence, as light indicates the presence of a source. On the other, as representations for the subject, these objects appear as forever separated from it. I only see the light and not the star itself. What, however, holds this contradictory relation of present inaccessibility in place? What allows for this tension (that will manifest in a "reverence": perhaps as the presence of God both emanates within and yet transcends the holy space, inspiring a reverential atmosphere) between the thing that simultaneously impresses as present but also withdraws as forever

unreachable? What allows the stars to appear as ready for empiricist interpretation, and yet, in their very shining, to transcend such interpretation?

Emerson gives the answer in his lead up to his apparent empiricist separation between the subject and its object: “The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches.” The rays of light, on the one hand, announce the being of the star, but they also divide us from it in calling our attention towards it. Those rays not only announce and scission us from the being of the star. They also herald the simultaneous presence and withdrawal of all things that appear to us. The rays of light “separate between him and what he touches,” insofar as they reveal all things to be like the stars-- reverentially inspiring heavenly beings. The strange point is here is that this separating yet binding light itself has a strange quasi-objective presence, one that keeps in place this differential opposition between star as found and star as lost. Immediately thereafter, Emerson likewise invokes the figure of another strange quasi-objective presence that both allows access and yet separates: “One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime.” As rays of light both reveal and obscure their source, the atmosphere both gives us access to these rays and yet refracts them as they pass through to us. In its transparency (a between neither visible nor invisible, almost as if it hovered between the sensible and the intelligible), this atmosphere simultaneously allows for the luminescent transitiveness of the stars to shine through, mimes this luminescent power, and

practically condenses it into a “perpetual presence of the sublime.” The “presence of the sublime” is an appropriately odd phrase, since the sublime takes place at the edge of presence, where representation reaches its limits in the face of the inaccessible, returning the subject to itself in a moment of awe.

As we found Emerson transporting us earlier from the abstraction of the social concept into the chamber and back out into nature again (or Wordsworth moving us between similar spaces and distances and modalities), this atmosphere of sublime transcendence descends into urban life, allowing for another binding of presence to separation:

Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.
(*TCRWE* II, 8-9)

This “one night in a thousand years” was perhaps one actual night some thousands of years ago, since the stars were wondered at as divine before they were viewed as natural phenomena, and these believers took those stars to herald the presence of gods and angels who controlled the destiny of those below, who created mythic stories about them. Seen in this light, Emerson impels the city dweller, now exited from her chamber, strolling in a deeper isolation, to re-enter this ancient space of reverential wonder, with this transcending wonder now being the crux of isolation and with this dweller’s lonely chamber expanded to include the dome of the heavens. We have, apparently, forgotten our capacity for this transcending encounter, not only with the stars but with transcendence itself, because of the

commonplace nature of normal stargazing, if we take the time to look up at all. But Emerson reminds us that its possibility remains, twinkling every night in admonishment.

In such a state of wonder, “nature never wears a mean appearance,” precisely because the “mean” as “common” has been transformed into the uncommon everyday. What we have here in these movements from rays of light to the actual atmosphere to the spacing of transcendence as a metaphorical atmosphere, surrounding and pervading everything is a drawing into the “isolation” of subjective engagement that transcends the solitude of loneliness. In the movement towards this realization, Emerson has proceeded from the simple conceptual division between the subject and the object—the ME and the NOT ME—and he has moved us through figures of retreat (from the social to the chamber, from the chamber to the private gaze, from the private gaze to the separating/dividing rays that make it possible, to the atmosphere that refracts the rays, to the atmosphere of the social and historical that both withholds and yet allows for wonder, and then back to those stars themselves, smilingly singularizing the one who beholds them in her higher isolation.

In this other chamber of isolation, beyond abstraction and loneliness, within a circulating atmosphere of transcendence illuminated by refracted starlight, my intellect (“curiosity”) is directed towards the perfection of things, without that perfection ever being exhausted. Once again, Emerson echoes Wordsworth, as he finds “the flowers, the animals, the mountains” to reflect “the wisdom of his best

hour” (Wordsworth from “Tintern Abbey”—“On that best portion of a good man's life”), revealing how this circulating aura inspires those things caught up in its vortex. Emerson here reflects,

When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the mind. We mean the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter, from the tree of the poet. (*TCRWE* II, 9)

Thus, we have travelled from the impression of nature, even the impression of the star, to the underlying integrity of that impression, that which holds it together within itself and in relation to others. Of this integrity, we both speak in a poetic sense and reveal the working of this poetic sense in nature itself, bearing witness to its transition from the atomized fragment into the integrated articulation. Our gaze shifts from the industrialized severance of nature from itself, not from the saw but rather from the eye of the wood-cutter, and towards the living tree, restored to itself, through the vision of the poet. The philosophical empiricist, in this sense, is an intellectual wood-cutter of the soul, insofar as she severs the circle of the subject's life in its projection of reasons in which it, temporalizing, subsists as the being it is. The idealist such as Rödl, therefore, restores this circling life back to itself from out of its self-dissection, in a revelatory step back into explicit self-consciousness. The poetic idealist such as Wordsworth or Emerson also provides for this step back, but it is a step back not merely of the intellect into its living involvement with its world of ends but of the materialized person, where this materialization is now not merely understood as the situating ground of projection but rather as that which carries this projection forth, in the dynamics of the

affective body, the stepping into nature, the concrete upwards glance, where the spiritual atmosphere and the real one merge in a moment of disclosive reverence.⁶⁰

Whereas an idealist like Kant, for instance, reveals that underlying the supposed disconnectedness of our impressions of things, there operates a subjectified schematism, a substratum of imagination binding and presenting those things for what they are, holding the subject together as it holds this imaginative activity together, a poetic idealist like Emerson provides for a series of schematizing movements or transitions through which nature returns to a form of spontaneous apparition, its immanent light relit. Notice that just as Rödl does not move out of philosophical language in order to transform that language so that it shows forth its own self-consciousness, Emerson does not attempt to gesture towards a move outside or beyond language in order to encounter nature as such: an imperative towards the mundane real of “actual” involvement, that paradigm of anti-intellectualism of practical application. Instead, Emerson resists mere practical application as part and parcel of this empiricist tendency, while turning our language back towards emblems of the connected life of nature as I find myself involved with it.

60. Elizabeth Peabody articulates this disclosive reverence in a beautiful fashion: “This is not only of refreshing moral aura, but it is a passage of the highest imaginative power, (taking the word imaginative in that true signification which farthest removes it from fanciful,) the mind must become purified indeed which can take this point of view, to look at “the great shadow pointing to the sun behind us.” Sitting thus at the footstool of God, it may realise that all that we see is created by the light that shines through ourselves. Not until thus purified, can it realise that those through whose being more light flows, see more than we do; and that others, who admit less light, see less” (319-21).

With yet another invocation of the circle, in “The Poet,” we can see Emerson’s emphasis on the work of the poet in her turning the self out from the detachment of empiricism into a circulating, projecting wholeness:

For, as it is dislocation and detachment from the life of God, that makes things ugly, the poet, who re-attaches things to nature and the Whole, — re-attaching even artificial things, and violations of nature, to nature, by a deeper insight, — disposes very easily of the most disagreeable facts. Readers of poetry see the factory-village, and the railway, and fancy that the poetry of the landscape is broken up by these; for these works of art are not yet consecrated in their reading; but the poet sees them fall within the great Order not less than the beehive, or the spider’s geometrical web. Nature adopts them very fast into her vital circles, and the gliding train of cars she loves like her own. (*TCRWE* III, 11)

Emerson precisely shows the intimate relationship between the precise expression of language and the articulation of the world, claiming, “The world being thus put under the mind for verb and noun, the poet is he who can articulate it.” For him, the subject gets pulled in together with its objects in their circulating projective flow:

We are symbols, and inhabit symbols; workman, work, and tools, words and things, birth and death, all are emblems; but we sympathize with the symbols, and, being infatuated with the economical uses of things, we do not know that they are thoughts. (*TCRWE* III, 12)

Therefore, we do not realize (have explicit self-consciousness of) our intimate idealistic relation to self and world, and, thus, we need to be reminded of this deeper relation. It is the poet that does such reminding:

The poet, by an ulterior intellectual perception, gives them a power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes, and a tongue, into every dumb and inanimate object. He perceives the

independence of the thought on the symbol, the stability of the thought, the accidentality and fugacity of the symbol. As the eyes of Lyncaeus were said to see through the earth, so the poet turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession. (*TCRWE* III, 12)

Returning to “Nature,” throughout this entire passage, where I have merely walked outside under the stars, I am still in solitude, having withdrawn from both philosophical reflection and the lonely chamber into the living outside of the world (where I am already together with others), but this solitude is now not determined by the interiority of presence but rather by hushed reverence of the spiritual encounter with the world as spiritual. It is not as if a transcendent God flowed through all things but rather as if the pre-existing breath of such a God, the one that would animate Him, were He to exist, inspires both me and that world (and everyone in it), propelling us to exist through its imparted strength. This “breath,” like the rays of light separating between and the transparent atmosphere occurs not as a physical or metaphysical spiritualized ether but rather flows as the life of the subject as it projects itself towards the infinite in all its endeavors. This “life of the subject” is not a physical or metaphysical ether, precisely because it is no thing at all but rather occurs in the saying of the “I” that now finds itself in solitude, under the stars towards which it directs its wonders and hopes. Human beings always find themselves reasoning about what to do and how to know, but this reasoning does not encounter the existential dimension of its own occurrence, particularly the way in which it always already integrates the parts that it sees within the whole of life. In his encounter with the stars, Emerson’s solitude happens precisely as the

poetic engagement with this integration itself, allowing for a “seeing” not merely of particulars but also of the projective movement in which these particulars come to make sense. Poetic language allows this movement to show itself from itself, insofar as it evinces not only singular words and designations, such as light and atmosphere, but also its own capacity for illumination and transmission. After all, the illumination and transmission of meaning carried forth by language always transmits “from-towards,” with subjects and objects resonating in articulate, yet incomplete harmony, so poetic language would shine primarily not on particular things but rather on this resonating movement itself.

When we read Emerson here, on the one hand, we can, in a comparative manner, make explicit what he does through his poetic transitions through juxtaposing them with Rödl’s idealist formulations. On the other hand, in order to keep the integrity of the poetic transitions as such, to allow them to keep working in their effective mode, we must poetize ourselves, risking the loss of clear conceptual language necessary for the explication of poetic texts. This Either/Or is the price one pays for the resistance to empiricism, since in resisting this, one also resists the space of targeting academic thematization, where one treats the text as an object or collection of objects to be explained and situated or deployed for various purposes. As scholarly commentators, we must be empiricists. We are called by the standards of the profession as well as by concrete individuals instantiating those standards in their professional lives to be such empiricists. We are always already before the analytical law of empiricism. And yet, in order to enter into the space of Emerson’s

engagement with empiricism, as he both discloses its limits and gestures beyond it, we must precisely resist this wood-cutter language of the intellect in our attempted co-engagement with the working of his work. We must operate not only against the forces of institutionalized empiricism from without but also from those internalized within, operative within this very sentence.

Because of this, we must employ a neurotic turning from the hyper-philosophical into the hyper-poetic that oscillates along the path of what was supposed to be commentary and critical interpretation.⁶¹ Rather, however, than doing this to expose “theory to its material outside,” as is so often done, in an Emersonian spirit we must do the opposite, allowing an idealist spirit to dance with itself in its projective articulations, as it leaps from the poetic to the philosophical, over the empiricist abyss that lies between. Wordsworth famously said, we murder to dissect, and we may, perhaps, from our inculcated empiricist stances hear both Wordsworth and Emerson as being naïve Romantics, adoring the wholeness of being and resistant to any analytical explanation. But their resistance to the empiricizing of life is not a resistance towards life’s explanation but rather a resistance towards

61. This neurotic turning is required. If Emerson is turned too much towards the hyper-poetic, he becomes a naïve Romantic. We can find an instance of such unbalanced poetic turning in Arthur S. Lothstein’s pronouncement, “Vis-à-vis Plato, for whom philosophy is a talisman against the bewitchments of poetry, Emerson ascribes to poets, not philosophers, the pedagogical role of human liberation. Calling them ‘the children of music’ and ‘liberating gods,’ through whom the divine aura breathes, it is the sacred transcendentalist poet, not the idealist philosopher-king, who unlocks our chains and leads us out of our caves or cellars into ‘the open air’” (*Emerson in the 21st Century*, 88). For Emerson, however, there is no one central figure that liberates us but rather a circulation between thought and figure, as life finds itself in its overcoming of its obstacles.

the death of subjectivity as such, since the life of self-consciousness requires these movements to maintain this integrity, poetic or philosophical. When Emerson will go on to denigrate owners and producers, this denigration gets carried out not out of disrespect for these activities or professions but rather out of disrespect for the allowing such activities or professions to consume the life of the mind in the world, calling it perpetually into a disavowal of its own engagement with its environment, even if it must take apart this environment in order to live.

F. The Transparent Eyeball

One of Emerson's greatest sustained meditative streams of poetic prose commences in the middle of *Nature's* self-titled chapter "Nature," beginning with his first-person account of a glimpsed landscape and ending with his transformation into a great encompassing eye. This meditation encapsulates the essential structure of Emerson's anti-empiricist strategy. In order to provide a reading of this disclosive strategy, I will divide this passage into numbered segments to show the quite meticulous process of Emerson's poetic making-explicit of the truth of idealism in the face of our empiricist urge to disavow this truth:

1. The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. (*TCRWE* I, 9)

I suppose that I am Emerson on a typical morning stroll. On such a stroll, on the one hand, my possibilities for action seem endless. If I am walking, I might strike up a conversation with a person across the way or head out into the forest to look for berries or construct an altar to imagined arboreal deities or. . . . While

walking, on the other hand, I perpetually see “a landscape,” a demarcation of the horizon of engagement that already implies a certain confinement: a background of being that acts transcendently in the proper Kantian sense, both providing for and restricting possibilities through providing a concrete empirical space of living. I might engage in any number of activities, but my possibilities of engagement will always already be limited by certain empirical constraints; for instance, by the boundary of walking too far, beyond the distance that I could safely travel back to find home and food. In order to assess the landscape, so that they can safely travel within it, human beings must, as a function of the existence of a “landscape” at all (and not an unbounded horizon of chaotic progression), cordon that landscape into manageable regions for a variety of purposes. One of the principal modes of cordoning the landscape is to section “it” off into parcels of property. The landscape painting shows the interplay between the presentation of the boundless, in the opening extendedness of nature in the horizontal line, and the presentation of the bounded, in the containment of a specific aesthetic field of items, spaces, colors, and relations.

In Emerson’s account, we find someone named “Miller” (perhaps as one who processes the trees cut by the woodcutter in a timber mill or grain harvested by the farmer in a grain mill) who both owns a plot of land and uses that land for an assigned purpose. We encounter another person, “Locke,” whose name perhaps indicates that Emerson here is directly addressing the empiricist as one who divides experience into manageable subcomponents at the expense of the whole.

Simultaneously, this appellation of “Locke” implies the entire range of confinements and securities associating with the lock itself (including the flintlock), through which the segmented landscape is held in its proper order. Finally, we come across “Manning,” whose name indicates not only the presence of the human throughout this cordoned landscape but also the necessary positioning and working of the human in the activity of maintaining the landscaped zones against their loss through the chaotic contingencies of natural irruptions. Thus, when Emerson informs us that “none of them owns the landscape,” he completes a double disclosive move. On the one hand, he shows the operative limiting inherent within seeing the landscape as such and the way in which this operative limiting resonates with the concretized empiricism of human life. On the other, however, precisely in the disclosure of the landscape as limit, he reveals it as the possibility of transcending these given boundaries in the pursuit of other possibilities. There is no human life without limits and without possession and without protection and without actively maintained confines, but the figure of the landscape not only shows the boundaries of these confines but also hints towards the infinite possibilities beyond them.

In “The Transcendentalist,” Emerson clarifies these issues of compartmentalization and possession through setting the empiricist (under the name of “the materialist”) in relief against the background of the idealist. We can make this identification between the empiricist and the materialist because Emerson’s materialist in this essay is not primarily interested in the objective existence of matter as external substance but rather in matter as measurable

(containable, compartmentalizable, ownable) mass: the segmented impression. Therefore, according to Emerson, “The materialist respects sensible masses, Society, Government, social art, and luxury, every establishment, every mass, whether majority of numbers, or extent of space, or amount of objects, every social action” (*TCRWE I*, 203). The idealist, on the other hand, trades in the immeasurable: “His thought, — that is the Universe. His experience inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world, as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in himself, centre alike of him and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence, relative to that aforesaid Unknown Centre of him” (*TCRWE I*, 203). Notice that rather than relativizing the existence of the natural world to a Cartesian subjective self-presence or even a Kantian subjective infrastructure of formation, Emerson relativizes the natural world to an unsounded subjective depth, an abyssal infinity that would extend through all things. To be sure, Emerson sometimes phrases the issue in this essay as if the soul were something like a subjective container, claiming, “I — this thought which is called I, — is the mould into which the world is poured like melted wax. The mould is invisible, but the world betrays the shape of the mould” (*TCRWE I*, 204). But insofar as this mould is nothing other than the unsounded itself, its function of containment operates paradoxically, as an opening rather than an enclosure, which is why the world, perhaps, flows precisely as melting wax rather than subsisting as a hardened, maintaining the impression of a given form.

2. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty-deeds give no title. (*TCRWE* I, 9)

This transcendental seeing of the landscape, which means seeing it as the limited limitless, gives the human being, beyond her possession of property, another “property in the horizon” that demarcates and opens on the edge of the infinite. Emerson’s transition from the term “landscape” to “horizon” is significant, since it evinces a movement of realization that proceeds from the static positioning of a limited opening (locating the landscape like a door, that both opens beyond but simultaneously limits access) to a moving-opening that exceeds all boundaries. The most interesting thing about this horizontal moving-opening (that the poet can see) is the fact that it perdures as a condition of all integration: a horizon moves along with and opens up according to the various modes of keeping things apart and holding them together.

This, according to Emerson, is “the best part of these men’s farms,” and yet their protective/social modes of holding these farms in place (through the warranty of legal deeds and labor deeds) do not give them access to this horizon. For that, they must shift their lines of vision into a mode of poetic seeing that reveals the horizon in everything: the opening of the infinite in all of the finite modes of human presentation. Particularly, this invocation of the poetic requires a turning of language, not back into the mundane vocabulary of everyday life, a language that is always already empiricized, but rather into an aesthetically idealized language, given to excesses of the beautiful and sublime. This turning must twist both out of

the mundane and out of the industrialized fabrications of language, beyond the everyday parlance of tending cattle and the professional jargon of dairy production and into enunciating the between of living-beyond that happens at the crossing between the human subject and the world she confronts.

In “The Poet,” Emerson refers to this “living-beyond” as a “divine aura”: “The condition of true naming, on the poet’s part, is his resigning himself to the divine aura which breathes through forms. . .” (*TCRWE* III, 15) In poetic speaking, a resonance takes place between what is spoken and what is spoken about. This does not happen through a simple onomatopoeic mimesis but rather through the co-engagement of a poetic circulation. The poet suffers “the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him: then he is caught up into the life of the Universe, his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals” (*TCRWE* III, 16). This happens because the projective infinities in naming and the endless grounding of the natural call to one another and harmonize together in the search for articulation. Such articulation is always only a search, not a delineation, since “The poet knows that he speaks adequately, then, only when he speaks somewhat wildly, or, “with the flower of the mind;” not with the intellect, used as an organ, but with the intellect released from all service, and suffered to take its direction from its celestial life . . .” (*TCRWE* III, 16). For Emerson, true speaking requires the liberation of the word from self-possession in the face of the liberation of the landscape of nature from what human beings

consider its natural border, so words and boundaries are freed into the horizons of their possibility.

3. To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child.
(*TCRWE* I, 9)

To say that “few adult persons can see nature” seems, on the face of it, preposterous. Does this mean that human beings cannot see birds and trees and rocks and . . .? A quick way out of this counter-intuitiveness is to realize that the term “nature” is, in fact, both highly artificial and highly conceptual. For most of their civilized lives throughout their history, most human beings saw birds and trees and rocks, but they did not see ‘nature’ as a designated totality in any heightened philosophical sense. There is something of the idea of a totality like nature in religious myths, where a god creates the heavens and the earth, but this idea of creation implies the existence of separate realms of being—those things that exist below such as humans and animals and those things that exist above such as gods and angels. The idea of nature, however, is not the idea of a realm, but rather a way of understanding the universal being of beings: the natural world. From this vantage, rather than being counter-intuitive, the claim that most human beings do not see nature is, perhaps, too intuitive, since it is hard to understand in what “seeing nature” would consist, as opposed to seeing rocks and trees.

Emerson gives us a concrete example of “not seeing nature” with the phrase “most human beings do not see the sun.” This example does not alleviate the mystery of what would constitute “seeing nature” but rather intensifies it. Of

course, most human beings do not see the sun, in a multiplicity of senses. We do not see the sun but rather its light. We do not see the sun (in the sense of not being able to look at it directly) because it is too bright. If we see a photograph of the sun's surface, where its brightness has been astronomically dimmed, then perhaps this would count more as seeing the sun than the activity of directing one's eyes towards its shining apparition. Unlike nature, perhaps, we know the sun is a thing and would never suspect it of being "a construct" or "a concept" in its fundamental mode of existence. And yet, because of our normal visual relation to this sun, it has the same functional status as a construct or a concept, and as the earlier example shows, we can only relate to it as a thing directly precisely through a highly artificial and conceptual means. This, perhaps, is why the sun so easily becomes a god in myth, since its existence beyond its shining presence is unavailable for mere human eyes.⁶² Once again, what seems counter-intuitive in this phrase quickly transforms into the all-too-intuitive.

The empiricist within us attempts to stay at this level of intuitiveness. Even if she disagrees with the claim that we do not see nature or do not see the sun, precisely what she does is to gloss the meaning of 'nature' as the existence of

62. William Blake ends his "A Vision of the Last Judgment" with the following pronouncement: "What it will be Questiond When the Sun rises do you not see a round Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea O no no I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it" (*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 555-556). Such pronouncements extend from various religious traditions, shining forth in the imagination of deities such as Aten and Apollo.

concrete natural things and the meaning of “the sun” as the indirectly seen, theorized object of explanation for the presence of light and warmth. This, perhaps, is why Emerson says that “the sun only illuminates the eye of the man,” since from our empiricist vantage as human beings, we can only understand the existence of something like the sun through its roles within a coordination of beings. Before addressing the problem of nature, let us ask: what would it mean to see an apparently concrete being like the sun otherwise than through not seeing it but rather inferring it: thinking it as a cause of the light that shines in our eyes?

An answer to this question would, perhaps, involve turning towards the sun not as an inferred cause but rather as an experienced source. This distinction is subtle, since anything that is a “source” is obviously inferred as a cause, but experiencing something as a source involves something more than inferring it as a cause. Experiencing something as a source means affectively undergoing the wake of its emanation. Whereas inferring something as a cause implies a detachment from that thing along with a positing of its relational importance, experiencing something as a source happens as an encounter with that relational importance. For this reason, in contrast with the sun only illuminating the eye of the adult human being, Emerson has the sun shining “into the eye and the heart of the child.” Even though shining into “the heart of the child” means more than the child’s direct, affective non-intellectualized encounter with the sun, this metaphorical “heart” implies this at a minimum. To extend this minimum, perhaps, we could see the sun’s shining into the heart of a child not only in terms of its affecting the child

as a passive receiver but also in terms of its inspiring the child to go out and play: to run and laugh and sing and be happy under the sun. The young child, after all, does not think of the sun as an explanatory object at all: for her, the sun is that which one turns towards for warmth and light, without the necessity for words for either it or these latter two things. For her, the sun is a source of life, before the concept or meaning of life becomes an issue.

As adults, however, if we remember the problem of the stars and particularly the “rays of light that separate between,” then the matter at hand of seeing the sun (on the way to an account of the seeing of nature) quickly transfigures itself. Instead of saying, “Most persons do not see the sun,” Emerson could have written, “Most persons do not see light.” To be sure, human beings see sources of light and beams of light, but this sort of seeing represents a seeing of differences between colors and between light and darkness. In this sense I intend, human beings do not see light, just because light is a condition of any seeing whatsoever. Human beings see differentially lit regions as such, but they do not see the lighting of light. To put this analogously with the problem of the sun, rather than taking the sun as the source of a ray of light, we can conceive of the ray of light as being its own source, precisely in its emanating and beaming forth from itself. And whereas some adult human might indeed think about the problem of seeing the sun, at some level, since it is something to be seen, practically no adult human would ever think about the problem of seeing light itself. Perhaps light is the non-sensed condition of the appearance of everything visually sensible. In order to “see” such light, which

would have to mean in this context to receive its emanations inspirationally, it would never be a matter of mere perceiving. Neither, following the discussion above, could this seeing be an intellectual perception, precisely since the positioning it as an object of the intellect destroys its emanating inspirational quality that would allow it to be what it is: light as such. Thus, for the adult (who cannot by definition recapture the child's relation to the world: artificial naivete is always intellectually sophisticated), there would have to be a way for this light to be received in its lighting capacity, apparently, neither sensibly nor intelligibly, or, more plausibly, through some mode that cuts between the sensible and the intelligible.

Therefore, perhaps, "the eye of the poet" would be the opening through which this light might be received. In some sense, just as the poet's eye integrates the landscape (or shows its integrity) through transcending that landscape for the sake of the horizon, somehow hinted towards in poetic language, this same poetic eye would be able to see the lighting of light, which could be called the horizon of all lit things and spaces, through hinting (for itself, for others) towards that light in order to allow it to be received inspirationally, perhaps even through allowing it to participate in the coming forth of the poetic word. On the one hand, this participation seems to herald a return to a form of Platonism. In the chapter on Plato from *Representative Men*, Emerson notes, "As every pool reflects the image of the sun, so every thought and thing restores us an image and creature of the supreme Good" (*TCRWE* IV, 39). This may make it seem that the projection of the

word towards the thing happens as a projection towards some determinate and definite icon or idol, where poetry becomes tantamount to ontotheology. And yet, in the very next sentence (as often also happens in Plato's work), this transcendent ontotheology is itself transcended through an abyssal repetition, since "The universe is perforated by a million channels for [the human's] activity. All things mount and mount" (*TCRWE IV*, 39). Light shines as self-moving energy beyond the possibility of a source.

4. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows.

Therefore, "he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other" would be the one whose seeing eyes also open onto the inspirational sense of what is given in such seeing. Moving beyond the concrete seeing of the particular and into the seeing of emanation, where "a wild delight runs through the man" resembles the quite Kantian encounter with the sublime, where the relation to the concrete thing is transcended, opening onto ecstatic feeling at the edge of subjectivity, as the limits of this subjectivity show themselves as the horizons of the world. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the subject, insofar as it encounters itself as an individual presence, even from an interior vantage, as it beholds the emanations of its own spiritual power in the things it perceives, on the one hand, and a subject that finds itself beyond any individual self-determination, cast into the wake of (something like) a horizontal subjectivizing movement, with

this subjectivizing movement transcending any immanently interior (empiricist) reception. Perhaps Emerson uses the phrase “intercourse” to designate precisely this interactional movement that leads into delight running through (ecstatically charging) the individual subject.

This is a difficult thought, since the “spiritual” is usually thought, in our given, quasi-metaphysical, quite empiricist sense as the influx or containment of a heavenly power within an all-too-personal soul. This is exemplified within dogmatic Protestant Christianity through its characteristic phrase, “having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” Yet, for Emerson, even though “The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine,” she does so in a quite strange de-personalizing way, perhaps even one resembling the vanishing of the ego in certain strands of Buddhist thought. This transcendentalist (from Emerson’s lecture “The Transcendentalist”) “believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration, and in ecstasy.” On the one hand, he seems to believe in the taking in of the spirit as the lungs take in a breath or the empiricist mind takes in its impressions from the affect of the outside (*TCRWE* I, 204). But on the other, Emerson’s emphasis on the breathing of inspiration is not on the holding capacity of the lungs (of the mind) but rather on the being together of the interiority of the self with the atmosphere that surrounds it. Accordingly, Emerson’s transcendentalist “wishes that the spiritual principle should be suffered to demonstrate itself to the end, in all possible applications to the state of man, without the admission of

anything unspiritual; that is, anything positive, dogmatic, personal.” Thus, the Emersonian “I” is always placed, inside and out, within a movement that transcends it (hence the name ‘transcendentalist’), and it finds itself sustained in projecting the universal, a movement as necessary as breathing.

5. . Nature says, — he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight. Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mourning piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. Almost I fear to think how glad I am. (*TCRWE* I, 9)

When Emerson anthropomorphizes Nature, allowing it to speak to its lover, the one who has turned towards it, we might understand him as thinking of this Nature as pantheistically-infused by gods or even as a god itself. The important fact here, however, is not the theological implication but rather the personalizing one. Precisely in his resistance to empiricism, Emerson attempts to think Nature as personally and intimately connected to the unity of the subject, with it “speaking” to her through calling her forth in projective ecstasies, just as she “speaks” to it through engaging it in action and cognition. This turning to anthropomorphism is not an erroneous, childlike misunderstanding of a material realm but rather a deeper turning out of a truncating empiricism/materialism into the synthetic comprehension of the engaged life of the subject in the world. Because of this engaged life, the moods of nature are intrinsically tied to the moods of the subject.

For the empiricist, the world is a set of meaningless points, interior or exterior, that are interpreted according to the imposition of concepts, including affective concepts. For the idealist, however, the dreary atmosphere that falls between raindrops is bound together with the sadness of the subject, for instance. The sad subject finds itself already in a depressing environment, and this environment is understood only through the projective response towards it that finds her, for instance, holding her head down and walking slowly through the heavy downpour. Likewise, in Emerson's case, in crossing an open transcending environment, with its silence and its still snow puddles and its blanketing clouds, he might indeed find himself pulled towards an "exhilaration," a breathlessness at this opening transcendence that would elicit a sigh and an upward gaze and would also call forth a happiness edging into fear for the loss of the personal project in the midst of the opening that makes it possible. For Emerson, both things and affects move within practically Escherian circles of mutual containment, with all of the paradoxes that such circles elicit. Within this paradoxical opening containment, "the universe is represented in an atom, in a moment of time," and it is likewise represented in a snow puddle, and the feelings of that moment are likewise represented in that same atom or puddle, not merely in the mental eye of their beholder (*TCRWE* II, 175).

For Emerson, this leads to a sort of transcendentalist ethics. Within such an encounter, he says that the human being "will weave no longer a spotted life of shreds and patches, but he will live with a divine unity. He will cease from what is

base and frivolous in his life, and be content with all places and with any service he can render. He will calmly front the morrow in the negligency of that trust which carries God with it, and so hath already the whole future in the bottom of the heart” (*TCRWE* II, 175). Therefore, even though affect may perpetually mirror itself between the water of the soul and the blue of the sky, the self-consciousness of this mirroring also brings with it another affective dimension, one of contentment and giving, where the indifferent bequeathal of the environment inspires the calm benevolence of the soul. One would expect nothing less than such harmonization of affect, as it circulates through projective being.

6. In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. (*TCRWE* I, 10)

Thus, as an example of self-transcendence in the midst of the natural opening that the self makes possible, Emerson describes the experience of being in the woods. For instance, in the engaged activity of walking through the woods, one sometimes encounters the shed skin of snake. This skin is a sign of the living snake that has grown into a larger, stronger animal, lurking somewhere out of sight. In the woods, a person sheds the more finite concerns of the particular age/time of life and recognizes the infinite involvement with nature, insofar as she infinitely projects into it and infinitely receives from it. In this sense, she becomes a child, precisely in the sense of inhabiting the world as opened possibility and as the supplicating sources towards which all of one’s need is turned. Therefore, the woods

become “plantations of God,” just because the woods are the site for the overseeing parental figure, as both the opening of freedom and the satisfaction of need. In connection to the reference to the plantation, we expect the owner and the design and the architecture, and Emerson envisions that we undergo this possibility of the encounter of nature within the woods as an orchestrated plantation festival, with us turned towards nature itself as the beneficent host that allows us freedom and meets our requirements.

We may take this plantation metaphor as a horrific one, remembering the connection of the plantation and its master to the horrors of slavery. But this taking is no different than the taking of nature as a horrific, meaningless backdrop against which the isolated empiricist subject struggles. We may interpret Emerson’s metaphor as politically suspect, but in its political suspect-ness, it reveals a necessary naivete through which nature must be encountered, if the freedom of the subject within it is to be properly understood. If the master subjugates human freedom in the process of mastering nature for profit, then this indicates the implicit possibility of celebrating freedom, providing hospitality, cultivating nature, and turning oneself and others towards the peaceful natural encounter. Therefore, perhaps, we can “return to reason and faith,” precisely as our thinking and trust turn back towards the natural world that provokes and draws them forth and away from the institutions through which they have been codified and segmented. We pretend that reason and faith are internal properties of the subject that have been cultivated for it only by virtue of the human institutions of

subjects and their relations, but reason and faith have always been involved in the thinking dependence on the natural world, in the truth of finding waterfalls and food and in the thinking that predicts weather and designs shelters in order to survive, hopefully, the coldness of the night.

We often believe that we live in a post-Romantic experience of nature, one in which it is perpetually commodified and turned into a technological object of representation, but for the most part, this is simply not true. When I walk with my dogs behind my apartment complex, beside the trees and on the grass, I find the incessant growing of the grass, the falling of the limbs, the use I can make of them for playing with the dogs, the trust I have in the sturdiness of the ground where I walk, and the warmth of the sun on my face. We have a certain empiricist language that suggests itself to us that strips the world of all its meaning and forces us to put it back there through ideological interpretation. The area behind my complex is owned by a corporation, cut by lawnmowers, controlled by laws—a completely commodified and technologized segment divorced from any natural wholeness. The language of Emerson's idealism is not a language of such (re-)interpretation but rather a reminding/recollective language that poetically turns us towards acknowledgement of our projective involvement with a world before empiricist scission. If the critiques that the language of empiricist scission have power (and they do), then they have this power only because we are already familiar with what they are designed to restore, the naturalness of the world in its intimate connection with reason and faith.

In his famous “Divinity School Address,” Emerson invokes precisely this communication between reason and faith as “Two inestimable advantages Christianity has given us” (*TCRWE* I, 92). Corresponding to faith, we have “the Sabbath, the jubilee of the whole world,” which suggests “the dignity of spiritual being.” Emerson commands us to “Let it stand forevermore, a temple, which new love, new faith, new sight shall restore to more than its first splendor to mankind”. Corresponding to reason, we have “the institution of preaching,” in which we should “speak the very truth, as your life and conscience teach it.” Giving the truthful word within the compass of the faithful day promises us “new hope and new revelation”. But for Emerson, we are always giving the truthful word within the compass of the faithful Sabbath, as we find ourselves always faithfully turned towards the needs and prospects of the day, and we are always naming and predicting and exhorting within the horizon of this day as we seek our future. It is true that we compartmentalize and calculate when cutting down a tree and equally true that we reverentially admire when we paint a landscape, but usually accepting and reasoning are joined within the projective life of the everyday, although we sometimes need to be reminded of this, perhaps, even, at a Sunday service which would especially mark this jointure.

7. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, — no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (*TCRWE* I, 10)

In finding oneself in the woods, where these woods have transcended not only their individual trees but also their forested being, exposed as a projective environment opening up onto a world and out of the subject for which this world is opened, materially receiving what is given in the faithful directedness of reason towards the infinities within every finite act, one also finds oneself preserved within this circulation. I may be injured in this environment, or I may be killed by disease or accident: I am supported by the material body from which I project.

Simultaneously, however, I can only engage this circulation within its reparative modality, precisely as the finite concern opens onto the infinite ends of the preservation of life and health and intelligence as an endless pursuit. The participation within this circulation opens the subject into the air of possibility, where there is a movement from oxygen to the possibility of breathing and going forwards in the exhilaration of subjective life and back again, as the life of the body and the life of spirit resonate in natural harmony. I am standing on the bare ground, since I find myself already contingently placed on the earth from which I project, with parameters and boundaries for my actions already set and with needs already impelling ratiocination, but I am already beyond myself insofar as I cease simple self-preservation and attend instead to the preservation of the consciousness of the infinite movement itself, to the self-consciousness implicit within any given natural act or thought, as I attend to the things at the edge of the world.

Within this attentiveness, I become the transparent eyeball, the physical thing yet opened to its transcendence, as it hovers between sensible and intelligible

space, *in media res* within a projective act towards a beyond. For the empiricist, the subject is either a spiritual container that cannot be an eyeball, since it can only be an interior with no outside, or there is no container and there is only the outside of associated cells, a blind eye with no visible interior, hence, not an eye at all. In order to be a transparent eyeball, I have to ideally project from a realized material ground, finding myself already situated at the edge of the infinite. “I” become the nothing insofar as I am opened onto the infinite projection beyond my finite self, the very projection that preserves this self in its pursuits and knowledge. In this moment of self-conscious apparition, as the implicit becomes explicit, subjectivity turns into its own circulation within a moment of transcendence. Since I am still in the woods, I am still subject to its trees and snakes and the other pressing realities there, but I also find the relevance of these realities maintained and known only on the horizon of my projective concerns in the midst of my idealizing being.

To imagine oneself as an eyeball involves encircling and transcending distinct impressions, their breaks and separations and the narratives used to stitch them back together, unless this imagination of the eyeball is itself such a narrative, as the empiricist would undoubtedly claim. In his essay “The Oversoul,” Emerson revisits the relation between parts and wholes mentioned in this passage in *Nature*, even mentioning the juxtaposition of parts and particles:

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the

thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul. Only by the vision of that Wisdom can the horoscope of the ages be read, and by falling back on our better thoughts, by yielding to the spirit of prophecy which is innate in every man, we can know what it saith. Every man's words, who speaks from that life, must sound vain to those who do not dwell in the same thought on their own part. (*TCRWE II*, 160)

Here, we have the same Escherian synecdochal dialectic that we encounter throughout Emerson's early work, where on the one hand, the soul becomes an internal God, conjoining every interior manifestation as a part of itself, made of its substance, and a particle of itself, individuated as a separate body, and, on the other, this soul becomes transported outside, as an external God that synthesizes the piece by piecemeal existence of the world, making it into a world rather than a collection of facts.

This might be easily read as containing a sort of naïve Plotinian metaphysics, where all separation is illusion and oneness is reality. However, when the paradox is properly engaged, we rather become involved in a "vision of that wisdom," perhaps one that can only be seen by a great imagined eye, whereby the "horoscope of the ages" can be read and prophecy can be undertaken. This horoscope and that prophecy do not involve seeing difference as illusion but rather involve seeing a different order to things than one which analytically separates at the expense of an intelligent understanding of life. From the vantage of this different order, life makes sense in the living of it, on the advent of finding meaning and unity against the horizon of hope. For the partitioners who does not share this thought as the

same, rejecting it “on their own part,” this vision and the words in which it is expressed “must sound vain.” One would be suspected of the ultimate vanity of a sort of transcendental narcissism. Yet, for one who does share this same thought, for the idealist rather than the empiricist, the vision and the words become not a theory of being but rather the outline of a mode of faithful reasoning whereby the priority of senseful living to analytical explanation is perpetually maintained.

In this realization, within this faithful reasoning, I become Christlike insofar as I become flesh transubstantiated. On the one hand, I am God, “part” of God since there is no meaning or purpose of the infinite other than in my own projection that connects to it, with my part having the power of the whole. And yet, I am also “particle” of God insofar as this infinite is always already beyond any localization of myself, as I find myself projected out of an endless past and towards an endless future of projective negotiation. The realization of this moving placement, this invisible making visible, in the paradox not only of situated seeing but also the stabilized movement of active life amounts to a revelation, a seeing of the face of the divine with a self-conscious mirror.

The empiricist will have none of this. For the empiricist, all talk of divinities and infinities become localized in corporeal immanence, sensed or constructed. For the empiricist, God cannot exist in the world, even though (perhaps) a God is required to give determinacy to the individual atoms of existence in a world where subjects do not exist. But along with God, for this empiricist, the circulation and the faith and the reason and the ends and the knowledge also vanish, replaced by

blind correlations that presuppose what they intend to disprove. This is so not because the witness to the absence of consciousness presupposes consciousness but rather because the saying of the “I,” its standing there in the midst of the woods as it voices itself poetically, would be necessary to carry a moment of self-denial, just as it is necessary to carry its own self-affirmation within revelation. None of this, of course, proves that there is a “subject” in the world hovering there like a floating orb and none of this remove the blindness of material interpretation, as the world is figured as a gestalt without the positivity of an image. And yet, this turning of the infinite back onto itself becomes proof of itself, not as a finite conclusion but precisely in terms of the exhilaration of life it affords as the subject comes into itself.

8. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, — master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature. (*TCRWE I*, 10)

In the chapter “Spirit” from *Nature*, Emerson makes a pair of distinctions, one quite traditional and another quite odd.

The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious. But it differs from the body in one important respect. It is not, like that, now subjected to the human will. Its serene order is inviolable by us. It is, therefore, to us, the present expositor of the divine mind. It is a fixed point whereby we may measure our departure. As we degenerate, the contrast between us and our house is more evident. We are as much strangers in nature, as we are aliens from God. We do not understand the

notes of birds. The fox and the deer run away from us; the bear and tiger rend us. (*TCRWE* I, 38-39)

The traditional distinction is the one between the body and the spirit. The odd distinction is the one between the spirit and the will. We normally think of the spirit (or soul), insofar as it would be coextensive with our conscious, intelligent being, as containing the will, or we think of the will as a manifestation of the power of the spirit. In either case, the spirit is not something separate from will, such that it would be “inviolable” by this will. For Emerson in the above passage, the spirit seems so inviolable as to have no power at all, only serving as “a fixed point by which we measure our departure,” almost as if this spirit were only a mathematical abstraction. And yet, both the world and the body proceed from this spirit, so despite its abstraction, it appears to have generative power.

This is a mystery if the spirit is thought as a substance that acts and is acted upon. The mystery vanishes, however, if the spirit is not a substance but rather the crossing point of the projective “I” as it returns to itself through projecting its world and its deeds within it through movements of self-consciousness. In this case, this spirit knows itself through determining its body as an object of knowledge and concern, measuring itself in this specific distance, just as it knows itself through determining its world as an object of knowledge and concern. This spirit is always departing from itself, even as it projects its world from itself and plans for the activities that the body undertakes. In order for this spirit to understand itself, it cannot risk identifying itself with the body as a static corporeal identity, a corpuscle of immanent materiality, but it must rather find itself in the purity of its projective

reasoning. When it so finds itself, however, it becomes a stranger in nature, with nature being as distant from it as we would be from an infinite God, were such a being to exist. Unlike the beings in nature, we have meaning, so that we are those beings who understand or do not understand, beings who localize themselves in the “away from” or the “towards,” and comprehend the alienating pain of rending, as their spirits lose their minds in excruciating pain. Even though these spirits bring their world into being, they also must withdraw from this world, like Zarathustra on his mountain, in order to know what they are.

Similarly, in knowing itself (in the numbered passage in our reading above), as it comprehends its world in the imagination of the enveloping eye, the spirit must withdraw from the name of the other and all determinate social relations that would be objects of knowledge and action. Emerson does not devalue the importance of the social and the relations and direct addresses that constitute the social. Rather, in this self-conscious moment of the projective maintenance of the “I” on the horizon of the infinite, which is the horizon of nature itself, this social nexus becomes embedded within this horizon just as all other objects and ends, as they are all surrounded by the opening of possibility that brings them forth. The wilderness, however, has a certain privilege, because in “streets or villages,” there is a concerted effort to contain the opening of projected within directed flows, an effort that is normally necessary for civilized life. In the wilderness, however, one has a “more natural” capacity to encounter unbounded possibility as such. Of course, in the woods, since these woods are a material space with pressing material forces and

dangers, one must bound this possibility and construct paths and huts that will lay the ground for streets and villages. However, in the tranquil moment, the natural woods reveal the contingency of all of these particular paths and structures. In their silent background, there are only possibilities of movement and wandering and staying and building and cutting and hunting and resting, with none necessitated by any planning architect, whether human or divine.

Even though self-consciousness, the self-consciousness of the projective speaking subject as it finds its woven life in a non-empiricized world, is a highly intellectual human activity (it is the possibility of human activity itself), this intellectual activity is paradoxically made easier in the unconstrained region of the non-civilized world. This is also not so because this uncivilized world provides “immediate access” to the real of nature, since every natural relation is always already conceptualized in the infinite projection of ends. Rather, this facilitation of self-consciousness happens because of the fact that in this situation, this necessity of conceptualization becomes more visible to itself, so that one within its wake can attend more easily to its ordering impetus, with the decisions and prospects that it affords. Within this “line of the horizon,” which is, after all, already a “line,” a geometrical figure that is identified within human conceptuality, human beings can precisely behold their “own nature,” insofar as their nature exactly involves the drawing of lines and the exploring (and containing) horizons into bound areas of life. The opening determination already at the edge of natural, found as it appears to (always linguistic) sapience within the natural space, is the beautiful: the site

where order both contains and is projected beyond itself (into disorder/uncontainment) at the edge of comprehension.

9. The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right. (*TCRWE* I, 10)

Another power of the natural world, along with its allowance of the visibility of subjective projection at the limits of the unfounded (finding as founding), is the way in which the teleology of nature resonates with the teleology of spiritual life. For the mechanistic empiricist, there is no “life” in nature, other than that afforded by the interaction of particulate elements, projected or represented. Aristotelian and Christian ghosts have been exorcized and the world has been disenchanted into a clockwork mechanism of parts in relation. But as authors such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michael Thompson remind us, our relation to a living being such as a fly is first and foremost not a relation to a thing composed of parts but rather to something that has ends, towards which and for which, and we understand the activity of the fly precisely on the basis of these ends: it flies towards the sugar in order to get food. We would not understand the fly as a living thing at all, with its life in need of explaining (through tracing its powers to underlying elements) if we did not experience it first as having living powers. We encounter plants as things that grow towards the sun and animals as things that seek food and companionship.

Therefore, in the woods, I find “an occult relation between man and vegetable” precisely because I become aware of a growing, self-nurturing and extending nature of the spirit in its analogical similarity with the plant that appears for it. The plants “nod to me” not, of course, anthropomorphically, as if they too had spirit like mine but rather they remind me of a relation (requiring a nod back), wherein I mark their living, growing resonance, not only with the life of my body but also with the life of my mind. I am reminded, for instance, by the “waving of boughs in the storm” of the way that life both bends and rebounds from natural forces, reconstituting and holding and preserving itself in place. And I am reminded of the way the subject constantly projects in the wake of irruptions of the new within its field of experience, as these constantly require it to bend and extend while yet holding itself firm in the maintenance of a self. Because these boughs and those trees do what is proper to life, they also remind me of what is proper to my own life, my own health and well-being and intellect and emotional growth (and the danger of dismemberment and death): these plants have their own sorts of infinite ends and they remind me of my infinite ends and they show me both my stability and fragility as I endeavor in the pursuit of these ends. The “moral ideal” of doing right, either in one’s relation to other human beings or to oneself, is not found in some other realm, as a template to which one’s life is compared. Neither is it understandable as “something constructed,” as if morality did not have something to do with the living/dying of life in the pursuit of its proper goals. There is a profound attunement between the tree’s keeping order for itself in the wake of the

storm and my keeping order for myself in the midst of emotional turmoil, and my moral/personal being may break down if I do not hold it intact within projections, just as the limbs of the tree may break in the storm if they have not grown to sufficient thickness to withstand these winds. We will be naturally inclined to say that the nodding of trees to us is mere metaphor, but everything about trees is metaphorical, including their standing, their swaying, their growing, and their falling, since trees literally do not do anything, they just are. In fact, they are not even trees but rather collections of atoms, if the concept of a collection was not itself a metaphor. In order for trees to appear as such, they must already be thought, conceptualized, described, and metaphorized.

These observations even further extend our understanding of Emerson's eyeball metaphor, since the imagination of myself as a transparent eyeball comprehending the natural surrounding is also the imagination of myself as a strange bio-spiritual phenomenon, projecting my own stability as ideal (thus transparent) yet having a certain comprehensive shape and orientation (thus an eye-ball) through which and for which this stability is shaped and governed. This resonates with the fact that as an "I" projecting in the world, for Emerson I am not a Cartesian ghost but first and foremost a natural body, so my participation in the transcendental world does not require me to remove myself as an actual reality. Rather, it involves a gestalt-shift like reorientation of my being in this world, so that I sense the world for me as being already grounded with the openings of subjective projections on the horizon of my knowledge and ends. As the structure of

the tree limbs both open themselves to the wind, allowing for their respiration and yet providing for their stability, the structure of my “spirit” as one of perpetual circulation, provides an orblike space for me to breathe as a sapient being. As a function of its “breathing,” my spirit moves from and towards itself in its repetitional placement of itself, its comprehension of what it determines, and its replacement of itself in light of this determination,

10. Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance. For, nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population. (*TCRWE* I, 10-11)

“The power to produce” the delight found in the self-consciousness of the resonance between this self-consciousness itself and nature does not come from outside of it, in an externalized natural objective world, but rather from within. But as this world shows itself within consciousness, as that consciousness projects upon it, then there occurs a realization of the harmony between the natural organicity of living things such as trees and of the horizon and the subjective-forming that occurs within conscious self-projection. This harmony may, from any side, be empirically contested. For instance, one may determine the subjective projection of consciousness that occurs in sapient life taking care of itself as the naïve surface of unconscious forces that shape these projections. And, at any moment and in multifarious ways, self-consciousness may be blind or deluded, shaped by forces

beyond its control. And yet, in order for there to be such shaping and controlling, there has to remain a (becoming) proper activity that is already involved in maintaining its life, otherwise there would be nothing to save through the lens of critique. The Emersonian reading of consciousness in nature may seem naïve to someone whose main focus is precisely the objective critique of conscious blindness, but the reminding of the strength and the shape of self-conscious movement is equally necessary in the face of an empiricist language that demands its occlusion.

This reminding shows us, for instance, that the apparition of the world for consciousness, whether deluded or not, not only affects consciousness but also shows itself forth in an affective dimension. This means that the moods of consciousness alter the limits of the world, so that its possibilities and even its forces come to be seen to resonate with these moods. Rain and outside dreariness, of course, may make one sad, and one may interpret the outside as having a sad look, but there is also an occurrence whereby the subject and the outside are “sad together,” such that it wants to go nowhere, precisely because the possibilities of the world seem closed off, withdrawn into the limits of the body and perhaps the room in which it lives. Mood is not something contained within the subject, but it is rather always already part of a scene and indissociable from that scene. There has never been a sad feeling that has not also been intertwined with the empty teacup into which one emptily stares or the corner chair into which one curls, alone. For this sad subject, this sad room is indeed the world, its world, as its horizon has been withdrawn for it. There is no objective world for the subject beyond its opening of possibility, so

the withdrawing or opening of the world in resonance with affect happens naturally, as a function of the modulation of this opening in projective articulation.

From the vantage of theory, such as this present writing or from Emerson's poetized theoretical showing, one can see both sides of the gestalt, sad and happy nature, the duck and the rabbit of projective possibility from the vantage of the posited enactive subject. But this seeing itself takes place in a poetic mood, and not surprisingly, this mood itself harmonizes with Emerson's account of the tranquil inhabiting of the natural setting, so that possibility itself comes to awareness, as the life of life comes to mind. Importantly, as well, Emerson in the closing passage of the chapter "Nature" reminds us of others, in the mention of the death of the friend. After all, in the aloneness in nature that affords the tranquility of a certain vantage on it, the friend is absent in one way, but this absence is itself already a reminder of the others, since in articulation one also speaks to the other, even if one determines oneself as alone. In death, even if there is articulation towards the dead other, there is no more possibility of the response of the other, so the life of speech, as it were, vanishes on one's breath, and one may indeed feel the fire of directed emotion and speech, life itself, to return to one as cold and empty. For the empiricist, these descriptions are only superficial layers added onto the coldness of impressions without meaning within (pre-)synthetic projection, so for her, things are already colder than cold: there is no duck-rabbit—there is only real material mark without meaning. But the mark itself displays another form of affective coldness, precisely one where nature has been retreated from, and there is only the

cutting coldness of the laboratory and the bureaucratic office. It is not surprising that Emerson ends this chapter “Nature” with an account of the affects both positive and negative that the natural world, like that encountered in the woods, affords, when one withdraws from this other form of inhuman, yet all too human, coldness.

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Vita

Darren Hutchinson, born in Florence, South Carolina, received his bachelor's degree in philosophy from Furman University. Directly following this, he obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy from Vanderbilt University. He has had a wide-ranging teaching career. He instructed in ESL language courses for three years in Regensburg, Germany while enrolled at the university there, and he taught philosophy and humanities courses at a variety of universities, including Vanderbilt University, Samford University, University of the South, and California State University. Along with his work in philosophy and literature, he is a poet whose first manuscript was a semi-finalist in a national poetry competition. He has been and will continue to be dedicated to establishing connections between poetry and philosophy in both historical and contemporary contexts. He admires poets such as Emerson, Dickinson, Stevens, and Ashbery, and he thinks with philosophers such as Kant, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Derrida. His work towards a second Ph.D. at Louisiana State University in English proceeded directly from these interests.