

—Chapter Four—
**The Mystical Imagination: Symbolism and the Aboriginal Self in
*Love's Body***

In order to bring out the efficacy and significance of the autonomous critical realms of phantasy and the imagination outlined by Marcuse, but forestalled by his dualism, the very possibility of an autonomous original aesthetic needs to be questioned anew. Thus, I am now drawn to consider a central problem of my thesis and its relationship with the romantic tradition: how is the 'new' possible? I want to state at the outset that this is only tangentially a problem of 'history' because the substantive theme is ontological. Thus, not 'when' was, 'why' was, 'what' was, or even 'what will be' the 'new'; but 'is' aesthetic originality possible? In Chapter 2 the divergent views on history of Brown and Marcuse were examined, and it is this that is at stake here. The idea of history as an imposition on events (as symptom or creation) against the conception of history as the process of events (as reason unfolding itself). Also, the problem is not so narrowly aesthetic as merely to consider the 'arts' (audio, visual, literary, etc.), but, as the last chapter has established, it is an intellectual (cognitive) and somatic issue.

My engagement with this question involves a striated reading of Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body* (1966) within the critical dialogue between Marcuse and Brown in the journal *Commentary* early in 1967. But, in order to open the issues involved, particularly with regard to the faculty of imagination in the Kantian sense¹ as the place of the

¹ To consider Kant as 'a philosopher of the imagination,' though central of the Romantic movement, still cuts against the grain of at least one strand of non-idealist canonical readings of Kant. For example, in Sebastian Gardner's recent introduction to Kant's first *Critique*, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1999) only 3 out of nearly four hundred pages even mention the imagination, and according to P. F. Strawson's canonical *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1995), the imagination is a mere go between from sense to the understanding (97) as it was, ostensibly, for Aristotle in *De Anima* (where *φαντασία* acts between *αἴσθησις* and *νόησις*). It seems Strawson would rather do

advent of the new, or that which Brown has termed the ‘mystery,’ I shall explore Kant’s origination of this idea as a romantic problem in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). I want to continue to use his critical idealism to show how we judge the new, how we can have intuitive access to what we do not already know. But, in order to preserve the tension with Marxism alluded to in the last chapter, I shall explore Cornelius Castoriadis’ explanation of how the new is a creative possibility at all. That is, as a critique of determinism in the realm of appearance (*Schein*). What I hope to achieve in this chapter is to lay out the condition of the possibility of the ‘new’ *per se* in the mystery of a continuously emergent otherness which constitutes the sphere of temporality. Moreover, I shall locate *Love’s Body* within that paradigm as a ‘fragmentary,’ and as such a romantic, response to Marcuse’s claims for totalisation, and thus defend it from the latter’s increasingly pessimistic aesthetics.

I

In his critique of Brown’s *Love’s Body*, ‘Love Mystified,’ Marcuse, drawing a veil over his own intellectual radicalism, writes: ‘Norman Brown has carried the burden of radical thought to the farthest point: the point where sanity must appear as madness, where concepts must turn into phantasies, and the truth must become ridiculous.’² Marcuse’s work, as I have shown in my previous discussion of *Eros and Civilization*, might suggest

without Kant’s ‘transcendental psychology’ as no empirical proof can be found for it (32f). But in my reading I follow Martin Heidegger’s 1929 work, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, (trans. Richard Taft, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), hereafter referred to as *KPM* in the text; and also works by Cornelius Castoriadis which I will outline below.

² Herbert Marcuse, ‘Love Mystified: A Critique of Norman O. Brown’ in *Neg*: 228. Originally published in *Commentary* (February, 1967), pp. 71-75.

that these words be taken as supportive of Brown's project—even as complimentary. Yet by the late 1960s Marcuse's aesthetics were less theoretically experimental than a decade earlier, and his new found counter-cultural political focus would have led him to be more cautious in his reception of such an 'advanced' work as *Love's Body*. And it was this cautious (the word must still be used lightly with Marcuse) approach that guides his *Commentary* critique where, along with other 'fragmentary' works, *Love's Body* is seen ultimately, as 'mimesis without transformation.'

Formally, at least, recalling Marcuse's reservations about form, he approves of Brown's style, in which the argument is contained in short aphoristic paragraphs, the themes developed in a 'musical rather than a conceptual order [with] progress through repetition, dissonance as element of structural harmony and development' (*Neg.*: 229). This method, Marcuse asserts, restores: 'The right of the imagination as cognitive power' where 'thought becomes play, *jeu interdit*, the scandal; the *esprit de sérieux* gives way to the *gay sciencia*, drunkenness and laughter' (*Neg.*: 229). It is on these terms that Brown answers the open challenge of the last chapter of *Life Against Death*; to set the body free to play, to *resurrect* it from the repressive death of toil alienated from joy. *Love's Body* is an example of labour laced with pleasure and a love of the lyric. It is a work that follows his own movement in *Life Against Death* from labour to love, expressed 'not in a system, as in Hegel, but in an instant, as in poetry'³. This recalls the circling crisis of idealism and romanticism that was posited in Chapter 1, where the former must not be able to find a system in order to need to express one, and the latter must have sought a system in order to be unable to find one. Indeed, it is the mode of the fragment, the romantic genre *par excellence*.

To recapitulate, one of the criteria of the early romantic fragment was its responsiveness to and responsibility for the voices of others; it was called writing together or ‘symphilosophy.’ Brown, in *Love’s Body*, goes to considerable trouble to achieve something corresponding to this confluence of voices by bringing together diverse quotations, not just academically, but also formally and typographically. He actually establishes an original page layout for his book that allows all his sources—his co-authors or symphilosophers—to be present immediately.

All walking, or wandering, is from mother, to mother, in mother; it gets us nowhere. Movement is in space; and space (*χώρα*), as Plato says in the *Ti-maeus*, is a receptacle, a vessel (*ὑποδοχή*—“undertaker”); a matrix (*ἐκμαγειον*); as it were the mother (*μητέρα*) or nurse (*τιθήνη*), of all becoming. Space is a sphere of spheres containing us; ambient and embracing; the world-mothering air as atmosphere. Also a chaos or chasm (*χώρα*), a yawning pit, a devouring mother. Without form; void; and dark. And then there is light walking in darkness: the son-sun-hero in the mother-dragon night.

Cf. Plato, *Ti-maeus*, 49A-52B, Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas*, ch. xi, §19. Róheim, ‘The Dragon and the Hero: Part Two,’ 90. Ferenczi, ‘Gulliver Fantasies,’ 46-47. Spitzer, ‘Milieu and Ambience,’ *Essays*.⁴

This is a typical paragraph or ‘fragment’ from *Love’s Body*. A general interpretation might suggest that it is a rehearsal of Kohut and Horney’s devouring mother, here philosophically anticipated as the terror of an as yet meaningless space. Two images, mother and space, are combined to form a mythographical symbol of the void (*chora*), where the ‘son-sun-hero’ creates his meanings, illuminates them, out of the darkness. And indeed, the section from which this fragment comes, ‘Nature,’ establishes itself on the mythographical understanding of a feminine space and a masculine definer (‘the little man in the enormous room’ [*LB*: 52]—Gulliver). The depth of Brown’s sources, however, sug-

³ Norman O. Brown, ‘A Reply to Herbert Marcuse’, *Neg*: 244. Originally published in *Commentary* (March, 1967), pp. 83-84.

gests that he is trying to get behind this duality, reflecting on the bodily sources of the mythical and the mystical.

If its sources are pursued, *Love's Body* is not immediately sympathetic to its symphilosophers and is not taking them at their word. There is a considerable amount of ventriloquism and even violence done to the cited thinkers. Particularly in that, even though Brown always provides sources, there is rarely an easy way of knowing which source is being quoted, which merely referred to, or even in which order they appear in the fragment. Now one could say this is bad scholarship. But as the trends I have pointed to within romanticism bear out, it would rather be bad *reading* not to check references, not to examine the *Timaeus* or the *Adventure of Ideas*. That is, in symphilosophy, the reader should never take the writer's word for it. We might know, for example, that Plato's *Timaeus* contains one of the earliest and most influential Greek cosmologies. It would not be too much trouble to find out that Chapter XI, section 19 of *The Adventure of Ideas* is a short discussion of Plato's receptacle (*ὑποδοχή*) or locus (*χώρα*), in which he asserts the unity of events against their constant becoming. Plato's chora is indeed often described as such a locus between being and becoming, which partakes of neither, rather allowing them to emerge into their difference. Likewise, Leo Spitzer's essay deals with the idea of a surrounding space, the perfect sphere of the Platonic universe embracing all possible forms. Spitzer, however, is tracing the semantic history of 'milieu and ambience'. He tracks them to the Greek *περιέχον*, a kind of sheltering space or receptacle that partakes of the physical and the spiritual (aether)—an all embracing locality—which has come to be understood as 'environment.'⁵ Ferenczi suggests an analogous position with

⁴ Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 50; hereafter referred to as *LB* in the text.

⁵ Leo Spitzer, *Essays in Historical Semantics* (New York: S. F. Vanni, 1948), pp. 179-225.

regard to his constant leitmotif of the birth trauma. The neurotic still perceives the world in terms of the womb, and the dream symbols he analyses refer to the point of birth.⁶ Thus, challenging the neurotic's sense of scale and relative sexual potency, that is, the 'Gulliver Fantasy.' This is analogous with Róheim's reading of the womb motif in mythology, where the 'hero' re-enters the womb in order to retrieve some sacred symbolic object.⁷ What we will see is how Brown gradually overcomes these gendered and polarised metaphors of a 'feminine' space and its 'masculine' determination. Finding a meaning that is founded on the body, but is not determined by gender relationships, but rather by the imagination. *Love's Body* becomes a trial of readership, challenging any easy reflection on its content, and where the imagery is closely linked to a reading of the history of philosophy (Plato, Whitehead), etymology (Spitzer), psychoanalysis (Ferenczi), anthropology (Róheim) and poetry (Brown).

It is perhaps helpful to go further and examine a section or chapter from the book. *Love's Body* is split into sixteen such chapters, and 'Fraction' is number eleven, coming between 'Fire' and 'Resurrection.' Other titles include 'Liberty,' 'Trinity,' 'Boundary,' 'Food,' 'Head,' and 'Nothing.' The overall pattern of the chapter 'Fraction,' suggests the fragmentation of the body and of meaning (two increasingly closely related subject's in Brown's work, as we shall see). Moreover, it suggests how these fractions are more important—more fundamental—than the whole. It begins:

To eat and to be eaten. The grain must be ground, the wine pressed; the bread must be broken. The true body is a broken body.

Nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent.

⁶ Sandor Ferenczi (ed. Michael Balint, trans. Eric Mosbacher *et al.*), *Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psychoanalysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 46-47.

⁷ Géza Róheim, 'The Dragon and the Hero,' *American Imago* (Vol. 3. 1939-1940), pp. 40-94.

Yeats, 'Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop.'

Cf. Dylan Thomas, 'This bread I break.' Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 290. (LB: 184)

Already we can hear the dialectic between part and whole, the mythological, the religious and the poetical. In Thomas' poem, the human body is made up of the fragments of the world: its food. But it also recalls the hidden or material meaning of transubstantiation, the part taking on the whole through the ceremony, through the symbol, which in turn becomes the human accepting the world through ingestion. This connects with Northrop Frye's reading the images of the winepress and the mill in Blake as references to the 'great communion feast in which human life is reintegrated into its real form.'⁸ Also, recalling Yeats' poem, it is necessary to hear a reprise of the scatological and the Lutheran from *Life Against Death*. For the preceding lines of 'Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop' run: 'But Love has pitched his mansion in/The place of excrement,'⁹ referring again to Blake. Thus, a general interpretation of the poem might include the body versus the soul, sensual matter against virtuous spirit. This contesting of ground between Crazy Jane and the Bishop, between madness and authority, between blood and wine—secular or spiritual vision, is at the heart of *Love's Body*.

Meaning, Brown is arguing in 'Fraction,' is in parts: a collage, or rather a montage (meaning is temporal), edited out of an historical body, smashed out of the dead weight of words. 'There is a seal or sepulcher to be broken, a rock to be broke open, to disclose the living water; an eruption. Begin then with a fracture, a cesura, a rent; opening a crack in this fallen world, a shaft of light' (LB: 185). Though the religious imagery is strong here—perhaps too strong—it is really only secondary: it is to be *found* in the words as a

⁸ Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.290.

⁹ W. B. Yeats (ed. A. Norman Jeffares), *Yeats's Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 374-375.

kind of fossilised trail.¹⁰ The religious meaning of these words, Brown is arguing, is their ‘literal’ meaning—which is not what they *really* mean, but what they are really *taken* to mean by tradition. ‘Literal meanings are icons become stone idols; the stone sepulcher, the stone tables of the law’ (*LB*: 185). ‘Taken in this way speaking and writing become kinds of idolatry, and I shall return to this point with regard to symbolism below. The important thing for *Love’s Body*, is to escape this reified written history—*historiography*—and to welcome an iconoclasm: ‘Iconoclasm, the word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces’ (*LB*: 185). Here there is a deliberately ironic inversion of Jeremiah: ‘Is not my word like as a fire? Saith the Lord; and like a hammer *that* breaketh the rock in pieces?’ (23:29) Brown usurps the authority of the ‘original’ fragmentation, where God smashes the words of the false prophets,¹¹ for the present. He reopens an aphoristic or fragmentary force by placing them in a deliberately non-conforming context. Brown is playing with their lofty sound, recognising their absurdity, and moreover, as shall become clear, returning them to the body (the flat breasts of Crazy Jane, the blood of Dylan Thomas). In addition, he is acknowledging that this kind of writing is precisely what his own practice echoes. ‘Fraction’ continues:

Aphorism is exaggeration, or grotesque; in psychoanalysis nothing is true except the exaggerations; and in poetry, ‘*cet extrémisme est le phénomène même de l’élan poétique.*’ Aphorism is exaggeration, extravagant language; the road of excess which leads to the palace of wisdom.

¹⁰ ‘Language,’ as Emerson famously writes in ‘The Poet,’ ‘is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin’ (*SE*: 215).

¹¹ See Harold Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975, p. xii), where he calls both Marcuse and Brown ‘false-prophets’:

‘Thus saith the lord of hosts, Harken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision out of their own heart, *and* not out of the mouth of the Lord.

‘They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.’ Jeremiah 23:16-17. However, it should be apparent that such a criticism does little harm to these thinkers. If they lay claim to the rights of the imagination then Brown and Marcuse are rightly named ‘False Prophets.’

Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 78. Blake, *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 7. Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, 198.

(LB: 187)

Here we have another typical passage in which two quotes are unmarked and slightly paraphrased, and the references are not even in the same order as they are given in the fragment. And Brown has knowingly lifted Adorno's quote about psychoanalysis out of its ironic context and used it as an authority.¹² None of this matters to Brown for whom 'Aphorism is recklessness; it goes too far.... Aphorism, the form of the mad truth, the Dionysian form' (LB: 187). Indeed, the irony is inflated, as with the Jena romantics. Aphoristic knowledge is important because it is unfinished (to this end he cites Bacon: 'Aphorisms, representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to inquire further' [LB: 188]); it plays with the self-imposed epistemic limits of systematic form. The fragment recognises the particularity of knowledge, the finite nature of the inquirer, the infinite nature of the subject. 'Systematic form,' he argues, 'attempts to evade the necessity of death in the life of the mind as of the body; it has immortal longings on it, and so it remains dead'; thus, in an unfortunate pun, 'rigor is *rigor mortis*' (LB: 188). Broken forms or fractions or fragments, however, are living, they are the form of eternity (Nietzsche). Aphorism, Brown asserts, is

Beyond atomism. Fragmentation unto dust, and the word becomes seminal again. The sower soweth the word. Dionysus broken and scattered. But if it die it bringeth forth much fruit. The body is made whole by being broken.

John XII, 24.

(LB: 189)

¹² Theodor Adorno (trans. E. F. N. Jephcott), *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 49. The section of the book this aphorism comes from bears the ironic title 'Dwarf Fruit.'

Words sown in their own history (as a written series, historiography) may perhaps fall on fallow ground ('the dead wood of systems' [LB: 190]). Ground up and sown in the present, on the blank page, they may germinate anew, like dragon's teeth. For *Love's Body*, this rejuvenation belongs to the authority of symbolism as linguistic coitus, to which I shall return shortly.

Brown's fragment, then, is not passive, it is provocative—an open challenge to test the responsibility of the reader. Just as we found with Emerson, the site of his meaning is always elsewhere, in a place of necessary incompleteness. One such place we might locate Brown's meaning, his *exergue* (there is another I shall discuss below) is in the history of writing, the essential deferral of the hermeneutic circle, the deferral of *authority*, which is always asserted by the failure of the fragment. It is a disorienting and abyssal prospect.

But it is to Emerson that I can turn for a significant analogue. In his writings this same abyss of authority is considered as the problem of 'Quotation and Originality'—the title of one of his late minor essays (1876). He writes:

Our debt to tradition through reading and conversation is so massive, our protest or private addition so rare and insignificant,—and this commonly on the ground of other reading or hearing,—that, in a large sense, one could say there is no pure originality. All minds quote.¹³

The debt of language to language (of book to book) is such and so much that 'None escapes it. The originals are not original' (CW: 781-782). And, provocatively, it is not merely mouths or pens that quote, but *minds*. For Emerson thought is quotation, and quotation is part of a larger removal from nature, from an original experience—that is,

¹³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Writings* (New York, Wm. Wise and Co., 1929), p. 781. Hereafter referred to as *CW* in the text.

the experience of creation. People behold nature, he goes on, ‘as exiles’ and ‘so they *quote* the sunset and the star, and do not make them theirs’ (*CW*: 784). This in turn betrays the very possibility of truth, which as we know, for Emerson belongs to an original (an *aboriginal*, or ‘from the beginning’) relation to the universe. But through quotation ‘they live as foreigners in the world of truth, and quote thoughts, and thus disown them’ (*CW*: 784). This would suggest that the sources of Brown’s symphilosophy actually write *Love’s Body*, and Brown becomes merely a palimpsest. But it would sound a false note if Emerson were so dogmatic. And indeed, Emerson is far from being straightforward on his determination of either quotation or originality. There are at least three ways in which these terms overlap and dissolve into one another.

In the first instance, quotation is often out of context, and may not even mean (even desire to mean) what the ‘original’ author meant; thus, ‘next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it’ and ‘Genius borrows nobly’ (*CW*: 785). Emerson’s own source is Goethe. In this case, all thought and all literature become a kind of refitted hand-me-down. Often, Emerson argues, this does a greater service to the person quoted, as in ‘his own [writings] he waits as a candidate for your approbation; in another’s he is a lawgiver’ (*CW*: 786). Thus, the author becomes an authority.

In the second instance, and this is more idiosyncratic, quotation is actually invented: ‘It is a familiar expedient of brilliant writers, and not less of witty talkers, the device of ascribing their own sentence to an imaginary person, in order to give it weight’ (*CW*: 787). It is not to pass off someone else’s work as your own, but to pass off your work as somebody else’s—a forgery. Emerson does this most famously through the cipher of his Orphic poet in the 1836 *Nature*. It is a curious position where the ‘original’ is passed off as ‘quotation’ to give it more credence. And it is almost impossible to find

out whether Emerson—or anybody else—is actually quoting or merely ventriloquising another.

The third instance is closest to Emerson's own heart and to the idea of romanticism more generally: it is the idea of genius.

To all that can be said of the preponderance of the Past, the single word Genius is a sufficient reply. The divine resides in the new. The divine never quotes, but is, and creates. The profound apprehension of the Present is Genius, which makes the Past forgotten. Genius believes its faintest presentiment against the testimony of all history; for it knows that facts are not ultimates, but that a state of mind is the ancestor of everything. And what is Originality? It is being, being one's self, and reporting accurately what we see and are. Genius is in the first instance, sensibility, the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world, and the power of coördinating these after the laws of thought. It implies Will, or original force, for their right distribution and expression.

(*CW*: 788-789)

That is, we are original not when we make things up but when we *quote* nature, and, moreover, when we quote *our own* nature. This is where 'what we see and are' become the same thing—the self is *our* perception.¹⁴ Genius, then, belongs to the ecstatic horizon of the transparent eyeball. It is the willed determination of what is, such that it conforms to our own being. It is fairly clear here that the Genius is the poet, the creator, or the spontaneous thinker, whose debt to what Emerson calls the flux of the past, is wiped away through a total immersion in the present—'the moment has the supreme claim' (*CW*: 789).

All of these ideas are visibly circulating in *Love's Body*. Brown quotes out of context and thus undermines the very authorities he chooses, he leaves the reader unsure whether an author is being quoted (intentionally or not), and he writes the book to strive for the ecstatic experience that Emerson finds—though his horizon is the body rather

than the eye.¹⁵ Quotation and originality become the condition for our responsibility to the voices of others, but, moreover, to the creation of our self. Because of this it is also possible to see all the attendant problems that were worked through in the Chapter 1. Both Brown and Emerson are attached to the kind of unabashed romanticism, that I called positive idealism, where our human perceptive limits are turned into creative faculties. What I hope to show in this chapter is the ‘origin’ of this potential in Kant’s theory of the imagination, and its persistence in Brown’s romanticism.

Now all of this leads to the obvious criticism from Marcuse. He argues that Brown’s self-consciously stylistic opening on the imagination cannot bear the weight of the inherited thought it seeks to appropriate in its intoxicated swirl.

But then comes the hangover; the imagination falters, and the new language looks for support in the old. Support in the quotations and references, which are to demonstrate or at least to illustrate the points made; support in returning to the primordial, elemental, subrational; to the infantile stages in the development of the individual and of the species. Psychoanalysis changes its direction and function: the latent content, the unconscious and prehistory serve not as powers to be recognized, comprehended, conquered, but also (and increasingly so in the unfolding of the argument) as normative values and ends. This grand leap into the realm of freedom and light is thus arrested and becomes a leap backward, into darkness.

(*Neg.*: 229)

Firstly, Marcuse locates in Brown the conflict of originality and quotation between the new and the old: the inability to escape their supportive structure or to support their conclusions. Secondly, there is an implied regressive re-reading (revision) of psychoanalysis which contradicts the (assumed) project of psychoanalysis and closes off Brown’s initial imaginative leap into an Enlightened future. Marcuse—arguably in oppo-

¹⁴ Compare Kant’s discussion of genius *Cf.*: 186-197.

¹⁵ See Conclusion.

sition to the substantive conclusions of *Eros and Civilization* outlined in Chapter 2—is proposing that the imperialistic characteristics of psychoanalysis (to conquer the ‘unconscious prehistory’ and move toward the light) are more significant for freedom than its discovery of the ‘elemental’ and the ‘subrational.’¹⁶ Marcuse seems to have returned to the Kantian idea of Enlightenment ‘as the human being’s emergence from his self-incurred minority [*Unmündigkeit*]’; a position which begs the question of whether indeed Marcuse is continuing to follow Kant’s injunction: ‘*sapere aude* [dare to be wise]’.¹⁷

This leads to another criticism of *Love’s Body* that I want to refute: Marcuse’s contention that Brown drags freedom backward into the dark. This, I would argue, is not at all the place where Brown locates freedom. *Love’s Body*, as Brown rejoins, strives ‘to surpass the Enlightenment notion that in the life of the species or the individual there is a definitive change-over from darkness to light. Light is always in darkness; that is what the unconscious is all about’ (*Neg.*: 244). The individual is not constructed in light, nor is he or she bound toward the light—there is an inevitable cyclicity in even the most progressive theories of the ‘subject’ that necessarily negates the luminary tendencies within psychoanalysis. As Brown puts it:

Psychoanalysis begins on the side of imperialism, or enlightenment, invading the heart of darkness, carrying bright shafts of daylight (*lucida tela diei*), carrying the Bible and flag of the reality principle. Psychoanalysis ends in the recognition of the reality principle as Lucifer, the prince of Darkness, the prince of this world, the governing principle, the ruler of the darkness of this world.¹⁸

¹⁶ The hierarchical/topographical emphasis of this latter term, goes entirely against psychoanalytic thought—compare Freud’s rejection of *sub*conscious in favour of *un*conscious: the unconscious surrounds from within.

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, ‘What is Enlightenment’ in (trans. and ed. Mary Gregor.) *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 17.

¹⁸ In this passage there is a deliberate echo of Nietzsche’s irony in *Twilight of the Idols*: ‘Reason = virtue = happiness means merely: one must imitate Socrates and counter the dark desires by producing permanent *daylight*—the daylight of reason. One must be prudent, clear, bright at any cost: every yielding to the in-

(LB: 150)

Light and dark are reversed and negated by Brown's movement away from progressive Enlightenment and regressive Lutheran metaphors, and toward a 'new' body, love's body. The reality principle (Marcuse's performance-principle) cannot be redeemed lightly.

On the contrary, in the particular romantic philosophical inheritance I am working with, the subject can first be seen as both 'light' and 'dark' ('the son-sun-hero in the mother-dragon-night'). As such it begins to dissolve these anachronistic gendered metaphors by asserting the 'subject' as continuous creation; not in the 'twilight,' but as the place from which light and dark emerge. 'The reality of the body', Brown writes:

is not to be given, but to be made real, to be realized;¹⁹ the body is to be built not with hands but by the spirit. It is the poetic body; the made body; Man makes Himself, his own body, in the symbolic freedom of the imagination. 'The Eternal Body of Man is the imagination, that is God himself, the Divine Body.'

(LB: 226)

Love's body, built by the spirit, overcomes any implied dualism because it rejects the materialist 'hand' and the incorporeality of the 'soul.' As we saw in Chapter 2, Brown is interested only in an embodied *Geist*. He cites William Blake's remarkable and chaotic etching 'Laocoön' (1826), which consists of aphoristic fragments encircling a depiction of God with his sons Satan and Adam.²⁰ This could be considered a model for *Love's Body*, words surrounding and yielding an ambivalent meaning to the body; and Blake is a figure of recurrent importance. But it is to Blake's contemporary, Immanuel Kant, that I

stincts, to the unconscious, leads *downwards...*' (trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 33; Nietzsche's ellipsis.

¹⁹ Again, as for Cavell, we shall see that 'realization' is a key to Brown's working of the fragment.

now want to turn to show how an exemplary luminous subject of the Enlightenment (Abrams' 'lamp') was established, but, moreover, to examine the obscuring role of the 'imagination' in its conception. On the way I also want to illustrate further what Emerson might mean by the 'aboriginal self' of the 'American Scholar' (1837): the self *prior to* representation. And in so doing I shall go further metaphysically than Brown's own take on this in *Love's Body*, which is to use the political philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke to exhibit the idea of the 'Person' through the concept of 'Property.' Here I will show what the aporetic status of the Enlightenment subject means to Brown's romanticism by going to its idealist core. The question is, 'do people have property in their imagination?' For it is the romantic imagination that comes to emerge as the first point of contact between the incoming world and 'consciousness,' and thus as the creative moment of subject and object, darkness and light—being reducible to neither.

II

As Stanley Cavell has noted,²¹ Kant, like Freud, is concerned explicitly with the relationship between the inside and the outside, and both of them, to a certain extent, turn the outside inside in an attempt to give it form and thus gain a measure of control over it. I am referring here, of course, to Kant's self-styled Copernican revolution and to the status of the Freudian unconscious in therapeutic theory. For both thinkers the self, as 'I' (*Ich*, ego) is that which corresponds to the inside, however tentative and unverifiable it may eventually come to be in their writings. Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781,

²⁰ William Blake, *The Complete Illuminated Books* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p. 403.

1787) attempts, with lasting success, to present a plausible and rigorous *a priori* (that is, prior to experience) model of the constitution of inside and outside, self and other—or, in more familiar Kantian terms, subject and object (*Object*).²² The opening two sections of the first *Critique*, ‘The Transcendental Aesthetic’ and the ‘Transcendental Logic’, are concerned with establishing the conditions for the possibility of *a priori* knowledge (which Kant calls ‘synthetic *a priori* judgements’).²³ I want briefly to sketch out Kant’s transcendental aesthetic and the conditions for apperception, laying the ground for a reading of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) as it is set out in the ‘Transcendental Logic’ in the first edition of the *Critique*. It is in this edition, as several commentators have pointed out, that the most radical approach to the subject and in particular the imagination is played out. After establishing the grounds of experience in sensibility and apperception, without going into their complexities, I shall move on to discuss the primacy of the imagination. Having done so I will have sketched out Kant’s three original faculties of the mind: intuition, apperception and the imagination.

We know from the first chapter that for Kant the conditions for experience are *a priori* transcendental, where the faculties of the subject determine what is cognised. A significant part of this as it relates to my reading of Brown and, indeed, of Emerson, is Kant’s novel determination of space and time in the ‘Transcendental Aesthetic.’²⁴ To be brief, both space and time are for Kant pure subjective *a priori* intuitions. Space is not something given ‘out there’ just as time is not something running its course apart from the human experience of it (that is, absolute Newtonian time-space). Space is that intui-

²¹ Stanley Cavell ‘Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman,’ in J. Smith and W. Kerrigan eds, *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 27, 42n-43n.

²² Kant tends to spell *Objekt* with a ‘c.’

²³ In the third *Critique* Kant calls these ‘determining judgements’—see Chapter 3.

²⁴ Aesthetic here has as yet no connection to the way the word is used in the third *Critique*.

tion because of which ‘it is possible for things to be outer objects for us’,²⁵ and this outer sense is purely an operation of the mind within which the relation of objects to one another can be determined. Kant writes:

Space is a necessary representation, *a priori*, which is the ground of all outer intuitions. One can never represent that there is no space, although one can very well think that there are no objects to be encountered in it. It is therefore to be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances, not as a determination dependent on them, and is an *a priori* representation that necessarily grounds outer appearances.

(CPR: 158/A24/B38-39)

Space is not intuited alongside objects or as a part of their appearance (by appearance Kant means an as yet underdetermined intuition of the manifold) but is necessarily in the mind as an *a priori* intuition before such appearances can be apprehended. It is the condition of the possibility of the relationships between objects (e.g., geometry), not conditioned *by* those relationships (as the rationalists thought), and it is the condition for the experience of outer objects, not derived *from* the experience of outer objects (as the empiricists thought).

Time is similarly ‘merely a subjective condition of our (human) intuition’ (CPR: 181/A35/B51). It is ‘the form of our inner sense, i.e., of the intuition of our self and our inner state’ (CPR: 180/A33/B49). Time does not inhere in objects as they change their state. Time derives from the way in which subsequent intuitions are organised by the mind in that the subject can register a change in the state of a determined object—it is the pure form of ‘inner sense’ by which the alteration of ‘outer sense’ (space) is cog-

²⁵ Immanuel Kant (trans. and eds. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood), *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1781/1787]), p. 161/A29. Hereafter referred to as *CPR* in the text. I will maintain the convention of referencing to both the first and second editions as A and B respectively.

nized. Space and time, then, are the pure (transcendental) forms of intuition. This, in a much-compressed form, is the transcendental aesthetic.²⁶

Kant's second faculty, the transcendental unity of apperception, or the 'I,' is solely concerned with that intuition of inner sense: time. In the last instance, Kant argues, any synthesis of intuitions is referred to the mind's temporal faculty.

Wherever our representations may arise, whether through the influence of external things or as the effect of inner causes, whether they have originated *a priori* or empirically as appearances—as modifications of the mind [*Gemüts*] they nevertheless belong to inner sense, and as such all of our cognitions are in the end subjected to the formal condition of inner sense, namely time, as that in which they must all be ordered, connected, and brought into relations [*Verhältnis*]. This is a general remark on which one must ground everything that follows.

(CPR: 228/A98-99)

Representations, or the general determination of an object by a subject, must be brought under the ordering faculty of inner sense, but in itself, this cannot be the transcendental ground for the unity of all syntheses of the manifold in which cognizable objects are determined. Raw inner sense is only part of the necessary condition for self-consciousness. The relationship between consciousness, apperception (literally, self-consciousness) and the I (or Descartes' 'I think') is complex even by Kantian standards. Inner sense is composed of empirical data and is forever variable, and this includes the perception of self, that is, mere consciousness, and Kant argues that this 'can provide no standing or abiding self in this stream of inner appearance' (CPR: 232/A107). The fragmentary and vulnerable identity conveyed through inner sense is called 'empirical apperception.' In order to provide a stable 'I think' Kant deduces that there must be a further condition that *precedes* the empirical data and makes the experience of it possible. This is the *transcenden-*

²⁶ As Emerson interprets it: 'Time and space are but physiological colours which the eye maketh' (SE: 43).

tal ground of the unity of consciousness that asserts the continuity of the I (think) and the unity of all subjective perceptions, including that of the self. Kant calls this ‘pure, original, unchanging consciousness...*transcendental apperception*’ (CPR: 232/A107; Kant’s emphasis). Transcendental apperception is an absolute objective unity, which grounds all concepts, *a priori* and further unifies all intuitions under itself. That which gives stability to this model, then, is the ‘I think’ (*cogito*), in that the object is referred to it. Which is not to say that every object is reduced to the I think, but to say that the I think is in every object.²⁷ This ‘synthetic unity of apperception’ is also the unified point of progressive subjectivity, the new central star of the Copernican revolution. Having looked at sensibility (intuition) and apperception, it remains to examine the most recalcitrant of Kant’s three original faculties, the imagination.

The imagination’s reluctance to fit neatly into the faculties arises in part from the fact that it has a dual function. It is both productive, establishing *a priori* the coherency of the synthetic unity of the manifold, and reproductive, constituting the ground of empirical cognition in general.²⁸ In the first instance, which Kant calls the transcendental synthesis of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), it is an active faculty that brings the manifold into focus; it quite literally *creates* an image (*Bild*), which is why Kant calls it a ‘blind’ faculty of the soul—because ‘seeing’ is dependent upon it [CPR: 211/A78/B103]). However, this function, the apprehension of an instant of the manifold, could create nothing determinate if there was not also the power to associate this image with previous

²⁷ This is also the idealist turn within which Freud can be very much located. Consider projection, for example.

²⁸ Even Kant seems to get this confused, calling the reproductive imagination firstly transcendental: “the reproductive synthesis of the imagination belongs among the transcendental actions of the mind” (CPR: 230/A102) and then suggesting that it is empirical: ‘the *reproductive* synthesis [of the imagination] rests on conditions of experience’ (CPR: 238/A118). I have chosen to read with the latter as it makes more overall sense.

impressions. This is the faculty of the reproductive imagination, which is necessarily empirical. Nevertheless, the actual formation of time or inner sense—the schema—remains transcendental. The reproductive imagination, then, as a temporal faculty seems to provide the ground for the synthetic unity of apperception, whereas the productive imagination, existing *a priori* seems to enable the pure intuition of a spatial manifold. Indeed, Kant writes:

the transcendental unity of apperception is related to the pure synthesis of the imagination, as an *a priori* condition of the possibility of all composition of the manifold in a cognition. But only the *productive synthesis of the imagination* can take place *a priori*; for the *reproductive* synthesis rests on conditions of experience. The principle of the necessary unity of the pure (productive) synthesis of the imagination prior to apperception is thus the ground of the possibility of all cognition, especially that of experience.

(CPR: 238/A118; Kant's emphases)

If, then, the productive imagination, as the ground of cognition must be prior to apperception, for upon it rests any unity achieved in apperception and because the imagination provides the composition of the manifold, then apperception, rather than being a unique and further indeterminable faculty of the soul, must derive itself from the imagination. Secondly, as the successive strata of pure productive syntheses, unified by the empirical reproductive synthesis contributes the essential nature of the transcendental unity of apperception (the 'I think' that accompanies all my representations), the originality of the temporal must in some way depend upon this faculty of imagination. Thirdly, the very possibility of a representation, the 'composition of the manifold,' also rests on the productive imagination, so the *a priori* intuition of space itself, as a representation out of undifferentiated appearance, falls under its sway. The signal thing that can be concluded from this is the pure intuitions of space and time, and consequently apperception, are

subsumed by, or rather dependent upon, the imaginative faculty. Considering the possibility of this deduction, it is perhaps no surprise that Kant chose to limit the power of the imagination in the second edition of the first *Critique*. Though, as Heidegger, and Castoriadis after him, point out, this was not a step forward into new discoveries, but a veiling of something more radical: the primacy of the imagination in the constitution of the faculties of the soul (*psyché*), and moreover in the subjective creation—illumination—of the world.²⁹

We might say, then, that the Copernican revolution is decentred almost before it has had time to settle. If this star illuminates the world, it appears to have no ground but that very power of illumination: the imagination. And, if I am to persist in taking Emerson seriously as a philosopher then it becomes necessary to take the following, from ‘Self-Reliance’ (1841), as a response to this Kantian dilemma.

What is the aboriginal Self on which a universal reliance may be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science-baffling star, without parallax, without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure action, if the least mark of independence appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, the essence of virtue, and the essence of life, which we call Spontaneity of Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions.

(SE: 41)

The bright light at the centre of Kant’s cosmos, the light-emitting subject, the transcendental unity of apperception, is here a science baffling star without parallax. It is quite

²⁹ See for example, Heidegger, *KPM*, p. 112-113. Cornelius Castoriadis (trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis), *The World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 215-216. Here Castoriadis after agreeing with Heidegger, then accuses Heidegger of covering over the discovery of the imagination himself. However, Heidegger’s only recently published work from the 1930s, *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning* (trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), would suggest that the imagination remains central to his work. See, in particular, p. 219; here ‘imagination’ is the occurrence of the ‘clearing’ (*Lichtung*) itself which Heidegger’s philosophy has pursued throughout. Castoriadis, however, could not have had access to this seminal work, which was published in German eleven years after his essay was written in 1978.

incalculable yet illumines all that is, even the most trivial and impure (or empirical). In this sense we might say that there is a mystery at the centre of our Being, called instinct and intuition, against which all attempts to understand it (tuitions) are derivative because dependent upon it. It is this that Kant discovers in the imagination but does not want to find, or at least realises that such a discovery cannot be relevant to philosophy as a science, that is to 'tuitions.' But for Emerson, and for the romantics more widely, this is the 'original relation to the universe' (*Nature*) that we can enjoy: 'We first share the life by which things exist, and afterwards see them as appearances in nature, and forget that we have shared their cause' (*SE*: 41). This is the aboriginal self on which we must rely, the common origin of nature, of space and time and self.³⁰

Kant's drawing back from the imaginative source of creativity is a foreshadowing of something I have already discussed. Kant makes a similar move in the third *Critique* where, after showing the power of the imagination to create new worlds, or at least to constantly alter what has been thus far given in the aesthetic idea—which I described as the very essence of romantic freedom—he hobbles the imagination with cumbersome and teleological 'natural laws.' Nevertheless, the idea of reflecting judgement always being able to exceed the given, and judge without prejudice the products of people and nature, seems to be the very model necessary to understand the radical priority of the productive and reproductive imagination. Because it is in the productive and reproductive imagination that the 'subject' *qua* its involvement with the world emerges from within what I am calling the new—what Emerson called the aboriginal self. That is, the new emerges from within the infinitely shifting manifold of particulars which, in the way I am

³⁰ I return to this in the Conclusion.

looking at it, both grounds and shatters subjectivity—it is the erotic expansion of the narcissistic self: love’s body.

Moreover, to come to the new without resort to the anchors of faith in the Divine or the laws of cause and effect—that is as unconditioned and undetermined/indeterminate, is something that seems perpetually to drive Kant’s theoretical philosophy, but from which it always turns away.

The unconditioned necessity, which we need so indispensably as the ultimate sustainer of all things, is for human reason the ultimate abyss. Even eternity...does not make such a dizzying impression on the mind; for eternity only *measures* the duration of things, but it does not *sustain* that duration. One cannot resist the thought of it, but one also cannot bear it that a being that we represent to ourselves as the highest among all possible beings might, as it were, say to itself: ‘I am from eternity to eternity, outside of me is nothing except what is something merely through my will; *but whence* then am I?’ Here everything gives way beneath us, and the greatest perfection as well as the smallest, hovers without support before speculative reason, for which it would cost nothing to let the one as much as the other disappear without the least obstacle.

(CPR: 574/A613/B641; Kant’s emphases)

This is one of the profoundest moments in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Here Kant takes his thought to the edge of the abyss, drawn by reason to plumb its unconditioned depths and question the very grounds of his inquiry, but from which he recoils. It is a moment in which, as he writes in the preface to the second edition, ‘I had to deny myself knowledge in order to make room for faith’ (CPR: 117/Bxxxix). This is a tacit admission of his withdrawal of authority from the imagination.

Kant goes further and presents the problem he is faced with, and which energises his contribution to romanticism and clarifies his importance for my reading of Brown:

The present world discloses to us such an immeasurable showplace of manifoldness, order, purposiveness, and beauty, whether one pursues these in the infinity of space or in the unlimited [*unbegrenzten*] division of it, that in accordance with even the knowledge about it that our weak understanding can acquire, all speech concerning so many and such unfathomable wonders must lose its power to express, all numbers their power to measure, and even our thoughts lack boundaries [*Begrenzung*], so that our judgement upon the whole must resolve itself into a speechless, but nonetheless eloquent astonishment. (CPR: 579/A622/B650)

The question I propose is whether the inquirer should follow Kant in seeking the correspondences that can be attributed to order and purposiveness, and ultimately to beauty and the sublime—reducing them all to a symbol of the moral order of the natural world and of its necessary dependence on an unconditioned first cause (Kantian jargon for God). Or should the inquirer push at the ‘bounds of sense’ erected by Kant’s critical paradigm. It is often said that to erect a boundary must be to know or impute what lies on the other side of it that needs to be kept out, and Kant acknowledges that topographically ‘every bounded space as...conditioned, presuppos[es] another space as the condition of its boundary [*Grenze*], and so forth’ (CPR: 462/A413/B440). Although this can be no more than an extended spatial analogy,³¹ it does yet imply the grounds for the enquiry into the infinite progression and regression implied by every boundary. The resulting problem is that the inquirer has to reject Kant’s distrust of metaphysical antinomies which try and understand the indeterminate in terms of the determinate, in favour of an erotic paradigm of ambivalence. That is, to exchange a unified field of theory for trust in one that is endlessly open and doubled, one might say fragmented. Instead of seeking answers in the extant version of the world, the question must be pushed forward

³¹ Consider the difference between limit [*Schranke*] (e.g. mathematical) and boundary [*Grenze*] (e.g. metaphysical), i.e., that which we can always posit in reason but not necessarily experience.

and backward simultaneously and asked instead from the open possibility of a future in which everything that is might be otherwise.

III

As I stated above, and have clarified in Kantian terms, the imagination is the first point of contact between the incoming world and ‘consciousness,’ and as the creative moment of subject and object, it could be said to partake of both, sustain both and yet be reducible to neither. The imagination is that aboriginal self from which both the subject and the object are continuously created, from which the ‘body’ emerges along with the ‘space’ through which it moves within the imaginative synthesis of the manifold. It precedes the constitution of representations, and because of its creativity, there is always the possibility for everything to be otherwise. The imagination is the focus for the permanently overflowing manifold from which the originality of any age takes its ever changing forms. It is, as we saw with Emerson above, that original relation to the universe that he called for in *Nature* and outlined as the model of Genius.

For Brown, ‘the point is first of all again to find the mysteries’ (*AM*: 2) and in my interpretation the mystery is precisely this erotic ecstatic liaison with the manifold. And it is the incoming novelty, mystery or enigma that forms the crux of the *contretemps* between Marcuse and Brown. Whether history is mystery or reason, whether it demands clarity or confusion, system or fragment, idealism or romanticism. Of course, this picture is being constructed within the crises of these positions, their mutual entailment, as

was set out in Chapter 1. It is a position presented in Kant's critical philosophy as the difference between those who believe in an absolute relation to the world—the empirical idealist—and those who believe in a critical relation to the world—the transcendental idealists.

In his first *Critique*, Kant argues that it is those who believe the represented object to be a 'thing in itself' (*Ding an sich*), existing independently from sensibility (the transcendental realists or empirical idealists) who cannot be certain about 'reality' because their senses must always be inadequate to prove the existence of the thing in itself from its objective representation in consciousness. The transcendental idealist, however, relying only on sense data and the testimony of a consciousness of representations can consider his or her world to be real, to be made of matter, and his or her immediate perception is sufficient proof of this reality. Thus, the transcendental *idealist* is an empirical *realist* in that he or she is true to experience without pressing a claim beyond that experience. Moreover, we know from Emerson the dangers and disappointments of pressing a claim beyond experience. '[E]xternal things—namely matter, in all forms and alterations—are nothing but mere representations, i.e., representations in us, of whose reality we are immediately conscious' (*CPR*: 426-427/A368-372). The thing in itself, as was set out in the preceding chapters, is not sensible, only intelligible. Only through the constancy of representations and the thoroughgoing unity of syntheses into concepts, can supersensible object can be presumed through analogy, perhaps even felt, but never known (cognised). For Kant and for Brown, I am arguing the concept does not obtain to the thing in itself; for Hegel and Marcuse, through the process of negation, the concept can take on this ontological weight.

Cornelius Castoriadis, who I now want to introduce in order to refute Marcuse's aesthetic determinism, shares Kant's radical doubt about the ability of the subject to know the world as it is, in itself, before or aside from any representation of it. The consequences of his philosophy of the imagination arise directly from Kant's problematic and can give further insights into the workings of *Love's Body*, for Castoriadis keeps himself open to the romantic dialectic between system and fragment, knowledge and poetry. The implication of his philosophy, however, is also not empirical idealism because the influence of the world is everywhere to be felt. Castoriadis argues that there are always two interdependent and irreducible ways to represent the 'world.' On the one hand there is what he calls ensemblist-identitary logic (the 'ensidic') and, on the other, the imaginary.³² Ensadic approaches to the 'object' are *essentially* deterministic, arising from comparison, collation, iteration and extrapolation. Societies, and in particular languages, are generally understood within ensidic relations and, separating himself from mere idealism, Castoriadis argues that the world itself lends itself to such an organisation. He calls this 'the first natural stratum,' wherein 'what exists always lends itself interminably to an analysis that constitutes in it distinct and definite elements, elements that can always be grouped into specifiable sets, always possessing sufficient properties to be definable as classes' (*IIS*: 228-229). Nevertheless, Castoriadis does not drift too far toward positivism, and is quick to signal his manifest intent: 'a natural fact can provide support or stimulus for a particular institution of signification, but an abyss separates this support or stimulus from a necessary or sufficient condition' (*IIS*: 230). Though intersubjective

³² Castoriadis is keen to separate his imaginary from the specular imaginary of Jacques Lacan which, he argues, reflects an other 'reality' rather than being an event of mutual creation. For Castoriadis, the Lacanian imaginary is just a contemporary version of Platonic ontological hierarchies, i.e., where things in themselves are 'reflected' as appearances in the empirical realm. See, Cornelius Castoriadis (trans. K. Blamey), *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1998), p. 3. Hereafter referred to

significations may ‘lean on’ (*étayage*, after Freud’s *Anlehnung*)³³ the first natural stratum, the simple anthropological evidence that cultures always invest the same ‘natural facts’ (for example, the ‘rising’ of the sun, generation, menstruation) with different significations is proof enough that there is always a creative moment that ‘leans’ across the abyss and gives shape to the phenomenal details provided by ‘nature.’

Castoriadis argues that the knowledge the scientist, for example, asserts about the first natural stratum, and which he or she considers to be in the object itself, is actually established by an ‘imaginary’ relation to it. This imaginary relation, he argues, is by its very nature unstable, and always prone to the new, to emergent and incoherent representations of the manifold, which in giving itself to the inquiring subject, enacts a continuous challenge to their inherited thought. Even though the first natural stratum ‘is ensemblizable—because individual events can be separated out from the flux of becoming and focused on, because of the natural periodicity of certain phenomena’ (*IIS*: 231), and thus can be measured and collated, this very categorizing ‘proves sooner or later to be partial, lacunary, fragmentary, insufficient—and even, more importantly, intrinsically deficient, problematic and finally incoherent’ (*IIS*: 273). The imaginary, which ultimately provides support for the institution of identity is itself constituted by a ‘representative flux,’ which from both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the subject (an abuse of language, as Castoriadis is fond of saying) affects the continuity of the world—which is to say, the history of society and of ‘personality.’

In ensemblist-identitary logic, the subject is a subject of (double genitive) history, there is an inevitable causal relation between history and subjectivity—Marxism, Castori-

as *IIS* in the text. For Castoriadis, as shall become clear, there is no distinction between the imaginary world and the world that ‘is.’

³³ Translated via the Greek as ‘anaclisis’ in the *Standard Edition*.

adis argues, is the most coherent example of this ensidic phenomenon. For him Marxism became moribund because it could not escape the dilemma of the subject *of* history who, as subject *to* history, was both determined and yet free. Marx's route out of this paradox was teleology—to present the causal history of the subject as inevitably drawn toward the emancipation of the proletariat—the disastrous outcome of which was, Castoriadis argues, Stalinism. If a movement is established on the presumption of absolute knowledge, of a determinate evolution 'toward the light' then, '[t]he multicolour phenomenal cloak must be torn off, if we are to perceive the essence of reality which is identity—but, obviously, *ideal* identity, the identity of naked laws' (*IIS*: 69). And Marxism for all its deferral of social laws and attempts at reflexivity still rests in the ideality of determinable relations between determinate entities—which is on identity working toward the ends of emancipatory dialectic.

His considered rejection of Marxism asserts that '[a] revolutionary surpassing of the Hegelian dialectic demands not that it be set on its feet but that to begin with, its head be cut off' (*IIS*: 55). And this fundamental decapitation counts for the same whether the head in question is the *Geist* of Hegel or the materialism of Marx.

It must set aside the rationalist illusion [of closure and completion], seriously accepting the idea that there is both the infinite and the indefinite, and admit, without for all that giving up its labour, that all rational determination leaves outside of it an undetermined and non-rational remainder, that the remainder is just as essential as what has been analysed, that necessity and contingency are constantly bound up with one another, that 'nature' outside of us and within us is always something other and something more than what consciousness constructs, and that all of this is valid not only for the 'object' but also for the subject, and not only for the 'empirical' subject but also for the 'transcendental' subject since all transcendental legislation of consciousness presupposes the brute fact that a consciousness exists in a world (order and disorder, apprehendable and inexhaustible), and this is a fact which consciousness cannot produce itself, either really or symbolically.

(*IIS*: 56)

With this refutation of ensidic Marxism, Castoriadis returns me to where I left Kant's idea that consciousness—as apperception—is produced by something that is not 'consciousness' itself, which exceeds it—transcends it. And this is the point where Kant oversteps his own ensidic programme and 'discovers' something that is ultimately non-causal: the relationship between the incoming manifold and the productive imagination. And by non-causal Castoriadis does not mean unpredictable or random, but *creative*, and by creative he means imaginative creation *ex nihilo*.³⁴ This is the discourse of the romantic subject, or in the terms of this chapter, the creative present of the aboriginal self.

I want to use this creative anti-determinism to frame the dispute between Brown and Marcuse, for at the heart of his critique of Brown is a relationship to the causal paradigm I have sketched above. For Marcuse what is required to further the revolutionary cause is an ever purer form of rationalism (in the Hegelian sense)—which may have to pass through aesthetic extremes, or the unconscious and the dynamic energy of the libido, but does not end there. Even in *Eros and Civilization* ideas of sensibility/sensuality were seen as epiphenomenal negations of reason as history gone awry rather than as genuinely constitutive and were dialectically synthesised accordingly. For, as I concluded in Chapter 2, Marcuse's relationship to Freud is predicated on history (*Geschichte*) working *itself* out, whereas for Brown causal history is merely a symptomatic

³⁴ We might ask 'how can we recognise the difference between the new and the merely random?' A useful way of describing this comes from the physicist Roger Penrose. He argues that the random is that which is determinate but un-computable, say, for example, to calculate all the variables affecting the collision of three snooker balls, including the gravitational force of the cue, the table, the moon and even the nearest stars, would be impossible, that is un-computable, but yet the event is determinate. Castoriadis, on the other hand, is arguing that the new is *absolutely* other to determinism. The point, then, is not to show that the original is *indeterminate*, but to realise that the very terms of determinism, the ensidic or the merely calculable, are inadequate to the question at hand. See Penrose, *The Emperor's New Mind* (London: Vintage, 1990), pp. 217-225, 558-559. Penrose himself is very uneasy about the idea of a strong determinism that reduces all possibility to the outcome of a 'cosmic' (my word) algorithm.

or neurotic imposition upon an inexhaustible nature—that is, ‘imaginary.’ So, Brown recognises in these extremes a truth which cannot be worked back in to Enlightenment progress, but is always on the other side of the illusory boundary erected by reason (even reason as ‘freedom’) and policed by the paternalistic reality principle. This conflict can be pursued through their respective attitudes to the reality of the unconscious and the ideas of latent and manifest content. That is, to symbolism.

Love’s Body, following Freud’s first topography, and paraphrasing the Sophist, Protagoras, says the human body is the measure of all things (*Neg.*: 245); because of this everything can be read, symbolically, back into the body; the family body of mummy-daddy-baby. Even human history is, symbolically, reducible to this corporeal transformation (transubstantiation). The father/king is the penis; revolution is castration (recalling the *Theogony*). His book begins with the ‘glorious revolution’ of 1688, which was the archetype of the rebellion of the primal horde, the ‘sons’ killing the ‘father,’ digesting his body (power) and redistributing his women (wealth). This visceral reality pervades *Love’s Body*, reasserting the mystery that the body holds for the social world.

To make in ourselves a new consciousness, an erotic sense of reality, is to become conscious of symbolism. Symbolism is mind making connections (correspondences) rather than distinctions (separations). Symbolism makes conscious interconnections and unions that were unconscious and repressed. Freud says, symbolism is on the track of a former identity, a lost unity: the lost continent, Atlantis, underneath the sea of life in which we live enisled; or perhaps even our union with the sea (Thalassa); oceanic consciousness; the unity of the whole cosmos as one living creature, as Plato said in the *Timaeus*.

(*LB*: 81-82)

Brown's embracing of symbolism, in this instance through Ferenczi's 'Thalassal-regressive trend,'³⁵ is the first step toward a more than nominal regression into the unity of the resurrected mystical body—which 'is not, because mystical, therefore non-bodily' (*LB*: 83).³⁶

Symbolism, then, is not here different from what *is*, it constitutes the way what *is* is represented, and as such is *all* that is. It is the way the imagination 'crosses' the abyss. We have come to rest on romantic, or positive idealist ground. What remains is reification (petrification)—dead symbols or dead metaphors. This is not only a transcendental idealism in that it accepts an unknowable stratum (unlike Marcuse's rationalist phenomenology). It is also a revision of Brown's own posture in *Life Against Death*, where the attempt to map the lost continent was, as we saw, a pure fantasy projection at the expense of the body. But, in *Love's Body*, he is rethinking the authority of myth. Mythical symbolism, he argued in his introduction to the *Theogony*, does not stand in for something else, it is not an attempt to map a knowable space by substitution or sublimation. Rather, in travelling simultaneously along the presumably latent phylogenetic and ontogenetic pathways, symbolism returns a unity to the unconscious body of mankind. The kind of unity embodied in the church, or at least in certain radical forms of religious prophecy, and still retained in the language of its ceremonies; the 'union' of the marriage ceremony, for example, and the scriptures, as we saw above. For Brown, in *Love's Body*, symbolism is no longer a turn from the body (a sublimation), but is a turning of the body outwards as measure into the world. It becomes a kind of transcendental metaphor that

³⁵ Sandor Ferenczi, *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* (New York: Norton, 1968), pp. 52-60.

³⁶ There is something of Zen experience in this. Compare, for example, the relationship between the mystical and the everyday in the great 13th Century Zen philosopher Dōgen, where the mystical powers of the Buddhist monk are 'fetching water and carrying firewood.' See Dōgen (trans. and eds. Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross), *Shobogenzo, Book 2* (London: Windbell, 1996), 'Jinzu [Mystical Power],' pp. 71-82.

grounds our knowledge. Symbolism replaces literalism—that is, the mysteries of the church replace its rational hermeneutic: ‘The return to symbolism would be the end of the Protestant era, the end of Protestant literalism. Symbolism in its pre-Protestant form consisted of typological, figural, allegorical interpretations, of both scripture and liturgy’ (LB: 191).³⁷ For Brown, correspondence replaces separation and as a consequence the unconscious’s power to create through symbols connections across rational abysses. Thus, the realm of the dream is more vital than the analyst’s ability to turn the dream ‘back’ into its latent content. The psychoanalytic hermeneutic is arrested at a pre-therapeutic stage.

There is another kind of Protestantism possible; a Dionysian Christianity; in which the scripture is a dead letter to be made alive by spiritual (symbolical) interpretations; in which the meaning is not fixed, but ever new and ever changing in a continuous revelation; by fresh outpouring of the holy spirit. Meaning is made in a meeting between the holy spirit buried in the Christian and the holy spirit buried under the letter of scripture; a breakthrough, from the *Abgrund*, from the unconscious of the reader past the conscious intention of the author to the unconscious meaning; breaking the barrier of the ego and the barrier of the book. *Spiritus per spiritum intelligitur*.

(LB: 196)

Symbolism becomes ‘enthusiasm’—and here we re-enter Emerson territory—a kind of mutual ingestion of and by extant meanings and the abyssal possibilities gathered in the deferred hermeneutic of ‘the book’—which is the dream-work of every book. The unconscious of the book is the meaning we can only read, literally, in secondary revision, but which is preserved in its symbolic redolence.

As with most ‘rational’ (ensidic) readings of *Love’s Body*, Marcuse considers that Brown takes symbolism too far, retreating into a phantasy realm from which the realities

³⁷ There is a similar turn in the thinking of Emerson, under the dual influence of Swedenborg and the

of class struggle and its social problems cannot be reached. This is, of course, a telling reversal of his own earlier position and the authority he gave to phantasy—though, of course, consonant with his later aesthetics. In his critique of *Love's Body* Marcuse writes:

The 'lower depths,' the 'underworld' of the Unconscious moves the history of mankind without dissolving its reality, its rationality. The roots of repression are and remain real roots; consequently, their elaboration remains a real and rational job. What is to be abolished is not the reality principle; not everything, but such particular things as business, politics, exploitation, poverty. Short of this recapture of reality and reason, Brown's purpose is defeated, and the critical destruction of history, the discovery of its latent and real content, turns into the mystification of the latent and real content.

(*Neg.* 236-237)

However much sympathy Marcuse's references to politics and poverty must elicit, in the terms of this thesis it still begs the question just what this 'reality,' this 'rationality' *is* that Marcuse appears so sure of. On what is it based if not on the paradigm of reason's ensidic reliance on 'external' reality as the measure of all things (a dualism that extends from Cartesianism to materialism), rather than the apparently far fetched mystical body or radical imagination? Knowledge must here conform to extant (inherited) ways of looking at the object, even if this is the Hegelian dialectic's radically unstable version of reality. It still assumes an essence to be obtained—the telos of freedom. This problem corresponds to Bloch's position in the last chapter on anamnesis, that is the fact that history for Marcuse has no real 'future'—time is but the sum (*telos*) of the past as process. It is then, as we shall see, a problem of temporality.

In 'Love Mystified' Marcuse argues that Brown overestimates the part played by latent content in manifest consciousness. He states that the aeroplane may be a penis symbol, but it also 'gets you in a couple of hours from Berlin to Vienna' (*Neg.* 235).

Quakers. Scripture is deferred and personal symbolic experience becomes the guiding 'inner light.'

Brown retorts that the body is the measure of all things, and Marcuse has given the businessman the last word. '[T]he real meaning of technology,' Brown says, 'is its hidden relation to the human body; a symbolical or mystical relation' (*Neg*: 245). This restates their opposed visions of technology set out in Chapter 2: Marcuse seeing it in essence (if not in existence) as progressive, Brown seeing it as largely irrelevant before the immediate concerns of the body (its resurrection). Thus, Brown interprets the relationship between the body and the world in a completely different way, and, as with Kant and Castoriadis, 'representation' becomes a key term. Brown writes:

When the problem in psychoanalysis becomes not repression, but symbolism; when we discover that even if there were no dream-censor we should still have symbolism; then personality (soul, ego) becomes not substance, but fiction, representation; and the primal form of politics becomes not domination (repression), but representation.

(*LB*: 109)

Symbolism is not in dreams but representation, the subject is not substance but representation and politics is not repression but representation.³⁸ This is a step back metaphysically from Hegel to Kant, and thus repression ceases to play a significant part for Brown, not because it is diffused, sublimated or no longer relevant, but because it is understood in a different way. Latent unconscious representations are real because they do not as Marcuse says dissolve reality, because they not only partake of it critically, they are, as symbolic representations, the condition for its very possibility. The dissolution of rationality is not a consequence of Brown going too far into the reaches of radical thought. It is inevitable because a *pre-rational* (we might even say 'metaphorical')³⁹ *surplus*

³⁸ *Vorstellung* not *Vertretung*.

³⁹ It is interesting to note that in the third *Critique* Kant begins to air his own concerns about the metaphorical language (he uses the word 'hypotyposes') that grounds philosophy; indeed, ground or *Grund* is one of the words he takes issue with. *CJ*: 225-227.

exists in every ensidic organisation, which makes ‘rationality’ open to its own incoherence, but also allows the rational to be imaginatively posited.

Symbolism, Kant argues in the third *Critique*, is the ability to take a concept belonging to one thing and to use it for another for which a concept cannot be found; it ‘allows the addition to a concept of much that is unnameable’ (*CJ*: 194). This is the outcome of reflecting judgment and the ground of the aesthetic idea as a projective possibility in line with reason. But as we have already seen, the ground of the conceptual understanding is, in fact, the imagination, which itself is, arguably, as pure transcendence, ungrounded. Brown follows this to its limit such that the ecstatic body is the only conceivable ground,⁴⁰ and thus pure sensation, the ecstatic horizon of the imagination, is the condition for the possibility of symbolism. Taking a penis for a king and/or an aeroplane and/or the father becomes the most pressing symptom of this. And Brown often repeats the Freudian extreme: a penis in every convex object, a vagina in every concave object; the body is the measure of all things; and, for Brown, the body, love’s body, the mystical body, is everything. The beginning of the mystery is to ‘perceive in all human culture the hidden reality of the human body’ (*Neg*: 246). ‘To the enlightened man, the universe becomes his body’ (*LB*: 253-254).

Symbolism, after reading Brown through Kant and Castoriadis, will come not merely to reflect the correspondence, however vague, between ‘objects,’ it will reflect their *co-belonging*. The origin of so-called free association lies in the more fundamental associations that make up the psyche, whose own birth is out of a ‘unity’ (Castoriadis might use the term monad). Freud’s famous dream confusion between his clean shaven friend R and his likewise un-whiskered uncle in the image of the man with the yellow

⁴⁰ The outcome of this is more coherently explained in his use of Vico in *Closing Time*. See Chapter 5.

beard emerges because ‘all “separate” representations that waking logic necessarily distinguishes are certainly formed starting from and in relation to a minute number of archaic representations which were the world for the psyche...and which refer back to the enigma of an original representing-representation’ (*IIS*: 276). Every representation, Castoriadis argues, bears the trace of this origin—he calls it the ‘radical imagination.’ But, moreover:

The psyche is a *forming*, which exists in and through *what* it forms and *how* it forms; it is *Bildung* and *Einbildung*—formation and imagination—it is the radical imagination that makes a ‘first’ representation arise out of a nothingness of representation, that is to say, *out of nothing*.

(*IIS*: 283)

From the moment Anankē starts the nascent subject from oceanic slumber, every affect and every intention—that is every representation—is laced with the radical imagination which ‘pre-exists and presides over every organisation of the drives’ (*IIS*: 286-287). Indeed, even the *Urphantasien*, castration, seduction, the primal scene, and primary narcissism, Castoriadis argues, are secondary to the radical imagination. For even these ordinary subjective experiences are representations, not original phantasies. The first phantasy, the primary representation (another abuse of language—‘*all language is abuse of language*’ [*IIS*: 348]) is necessarily *ex nihilo*. This is not to say there is nothing there—that would be to fall back into idealism—because the first natural stratum is always there; it is merely that that *is* nothing. It has no ontological weight. Until the emergence of the psyche, the world is the void.

The proto-world/proto-psyche—which Castoriadis calls primary autism⁴¹—constitutes the immediate identity of the ‘I’ and the ‘world’ which *enacts* the scene of primary phantasy.

Now the ‘subject’ is not a ‘scene’ in diurnal reality nor even in secondary unconscious formations. The subject *is* the scene of the phantasy (at once its elements, organization, ‘director’, and stage and scene in the strict sense) *because* the subject *has* been this undifferentiated monadic ‘state’. The phantasy ineluctably refers back, as to its origin, to a ‘state’ in which the subject is every where, in which everything, *including the mode of coexistence*, is *only* the subject.

(*IIS*: 295; Castoriadis’ emphasis)

Of course, this reference to an undifferentiated or ‘oceanic’ self has been discussed above, and Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization* and Brown in *Life Against Death*, have used it to explain central aspects of their work, namely a period of plenitude prior to Anankē. But this expression of oceanic unity as a semi- or necessary myth which continues in the repressed primary processes and occasionally emerges from dreams and phantasies into the light of consciousness does not go far enough for either *Love’s Body*, or Castoriadis. In those earlier works, critically for Brown and negatively for Marcuse, f/phantasy comprises a mistaken relation to the real. It is a misrecognition of that which *is*, which, even though it may retain a fundamental critical power, remains a poor reflection of reality (a remnant of Platonic ontology). The later Brown argues that Freud’s use of the term phantasy to describe the contents of the unconscious is, in ‘salvag[ing] its allegiance to the (false) reality principle’ (*LB*: 152), a veiling of his discovery of the crucial role of phantasy is the positing of the self. Castoriadis says almost exactly the same thing, arguing that Freud’s concept of phantasy (*Phantasie*)

⁴¹ This is a very different kind of autism than Rieff’s in Chapter 2.

covers over his discovery of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) (*IIS*: 282).⁴² Rather, the psychical monad, the phantasy of which remains in the radical imagination, is the original scene of representation, and it leaves its mark across the whole range of intentions and affects that the ‘subject’ represents. Castoriadis goes on:

It is important, however, to stress...the sovereign character of the radical imagination during all of [the following] stages. The subject can begin to sketch out the elements of the real, the object and the human other, only starting with and under the exclusive control of its own imaginary schemata. Scarcely has he grasped a bit of ‘reality’ when he must metamorphosize it to make it agree with the irreality which alone has meaning for him.

(*IIS*: 305)

The radical imagination could be said to be the unconscious of the Kantian imagination. It partakes of exactly the same role, but instead of creating unities of the manifold and of apperception, it creates disunities. These are only united in the phantasy itself, which is the phantasy of the continuity of the ‘I’: the emergence of identity from otherness. As Joel Whitebook has further observed in connection with this, the radical imagination as the remnant of the psychical monad is also analogous to Kant’s ‘I think,’ which is conditioned by the transcendental unity of apperception and accompanies all representations, but which in turn as the ground of all representations, cannot be represented (*PU*: 172). The radical imagination, however, instead of uniting representations across time into the Same—that is, through the ‘I think’ or the transcendental unity of apperception—disperses them; it connects them retroactively with things they ‘are’ not, but that they once *were* (that is, it is the origin of Brown’s symbolism).

⁴² Which is analogous to Kant’s covering over of the discoveries of the first *Critique* which we saw earlier.

To recapitulate, the radical imagination, like the Kantian imagination, is not restricted to conceptions of just the self, but also of the world—it is the original source of ‘world’ as representation.

As radical imagination, we are that which ‘makes itself immanent’ by positing a figure and that which ‘transcends itself’ by destroying this figure and by bringing into existence another figure. Representation is not tracing out the spectacle of the world, it is that in and through which at a given moment a world arises.

(IIS: 332)

That is, it is reproductive as well as productive. Though, considering the role of the archaic monadic trace in all representations, it might be better to say that the radical imagination corresponds to the temporal faculty of the Kantian ‘Schematism’ in which incoming representations are ‘matched’ to concepts *in time* (CPR: 271-277). The radical imagination continuously spans the temporal gap between the origin and the emergent, between monad as everything (that was) and the advent of the world as other (that *may* be). As Castoriadis writes: ‘it will forever be impossible absolutely to separate what comes from *that which is put* into images and *what puts* into images, the radical imagination, the representative flux’ (IIS: 329; Castoriadis’ emphases). So the role of the radical imagination is *temporal*, but not continuous.

Time *is* the permanent possibility (which is really a necessity) of the production of new forms that do not copy previous models or arise from abstract sets of principles, whether cosmological, natural or human—even if all these, as in Kant, are subordinate to the understanding. In this way, Castoriadis argues, ‘The wheel revolving around an axis is an absolute ontological creation’ and carries more weight as such than the arising out of nothing of a new galaxy: ‘For there are already millions of galaxies—but the person who invented the wheel, or a written sign, was imitating and repeating nothing.’ (IIS:

197). And Brown concurs: ‘Imagination is a better artist than imitation; for where one carves only what she has seen, the other carves what she has not seen; that never was on sea or land.’ (*LB*: 262). Castoriadis’s own exemplary explanation of this refers to Plato’s *Timaeus*, where the demiurge manufactures the world after a model, that is, the forms—he is, therefore, *creating* nothing, merely imitating. Thus Plato’s cosmology has no ontological depth but is merely a reflection. This is, of course, ironic considering the treatment of art in Book 10 of *The Republic*. Time, as otherness/alteration is the necessary faculty for autonomy. Castoriadis calls this praxis, which he sums up in the elegant phrase: ‘praxis is a perpetually transformed relation to the object’ (*IIS*: 89). This is the most pregnant possibility of revolution as absolute creation: *praxis as poiesis*.

In this sense representation is far from the bringing of appearances under the thoroughgoing unity of concepts, unity is only a possibility—considering its modality—not a necessity. And as a possibility, it has little chance of achieving the permanence, that is, the continuity, which the Kantian categories promise. This becomes Castoriadis’ conception of time as radical otherness.

Representation is radical imagination. The representative flux is, makes itself, as self alteration, the incessant emergence of the other in and through the positing (*Vor-stellung*) of images or figures, an imaging which unfolds, brings into being and constantly actualizes what appears retrospectively, to reflective analysis, as the pre-existing conditions of its possibility: temporalization, spatialization, differentiation, alteration.

(*IIS*: 329)

This indivisible but irreducible relationship between representation and radical imagination which *is* the psyche, the subject, is the origin of Castoriadis’s conception of time and of creation—which provides the impetus for an understanding of ‘mystery’ in *Love’s Body*.

First, it is important to see in this another exemplary occasion of the romantic fragment. I have already shown that the fragment as the central trope of *Love's Body* is figured against the impossibility of inheriting 'the book,' that is in a deferred hermeneutic of the history of texts. However, as I said, there was another way to read the incompleteness of the fragment into *Love's Body*, and this is to take the point of unworking as the 'body' itself. For it is quite clear, after the introduction of Castoriadis, that the one thing that cannot be 'represented,' though it is the continued key for all subsequent representations, is the 'body.' What the radical imagination shows is that there is an unknowable, even noumenal, mystery at the centre of our being. A kind of permanently corrupted archaeology that determines all of our conscious encounters with the everyday and which places them at one remove from us. It is an exact analogue to Emerson's question 'where do we find ourselves?' to which he responds, 'in the middle of a series, of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none.' In addition, it is the 'nothing' at the centre of Emerson's epiphany ('I am nothing, I see all'). That which would complete us, would *realize* us as totalized (mediated) subjects is always and irremediably other to us. It remains outside and corresponds to the edges of subjective finitude. The body, *love's body*, is (like Waldo) only *representable*, never *presentable*. It is *love's* body because it only comes to us in relation to the otherness of language—as corporeal metaphor, that is as poetry, and love is this co-belonging (from desire to love, from analysis to co-belonging).

Thus, the last section of *Love's Body* is called 'Nothing.'

Get the nothingness back into words. The aim is words with nothing to them; words that point beyond themselves rather than to themselves; transparencies, empty words. Empty words, corresponding to the void in things.

(LB: 259)

The absence, the void. On the other side of the veil is nothing; utopia; the kingdom not of the world. The utopia of nihilism, the negation of the negation; the world annihilated.

(LB: 261)

The obstacle to incarnation is our horror of the void. Instead of vanity, emptiness. Being found in the shape of a human being, he emptied himself.

(LB: 262)

The vision appears bleak, an emptiness at the very heart of Being. On one level this must be attributed to the various Zen Buddhist influences on Brown in this book. Nevertheless, this does not exhaust the meaning of his words. I think that we must allow that the trajectory of Western thought itself comes to this point—whether you follow it forwards or backwards.⁴³ Indeed, the reference to Christ's emptying out (Philippians, 2:7), is an important symbol of this trend, which we have already seen with Luther—that which is divine in us, Brown argues, we are too keen to give away. That which is divine in us is the transcendent imagination that discloses our immanence, our co-belonging: the nothing beneath the veil of metaphor, which is the condition for the possibility of metaphor. There is a divinity, a creative power, which is grounded in the void, human finitude, the no-place of utopia—where we find *ourselves*. In this case, the fragment is the most suggestive form to represent the nothingness of the body—the exergue of which is the ideality of communication, of language, of *symbolism*.

IV

⁴³ See Keiji Nishitani (trans Graham Parkes with Setsuko Aihara), *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (Albany: SUNY Press), 1990, for a persuasive reading of this trend.

Whilst Marcuse always finds himself caught, willingly, in the dialectical chains of inherited ontology, though implicit arguments may lead him elsewhere, Brown hangs, somewhat more precariously between the acceptance of otherness and a picture of the world as cyclical. On the one hand, for Brown the body is creation; on the other hand, it is resurrection. Similarly, language must both be new, turning to nonsense to negate its inheritance, yet his authorities are all 'old.' And, yet again, boundaries must be overcome and unity prevail qua introjection of the other. But the unity often seems an archaic-mythological plenitude more reminiscent of Eden or Ferenczi's *Thalassa* than the complex otherness of the monadic trace of the radical imagination. Lastly, Brown's aim is to engage the mystery of the world without reifying it, but the mystery always *precedes* (is re-found by) the imaginative resurrection of the self affected by it and is thus a cyclical movement which repeats the Same. His thought is given coherence through such cyclical metaphors, but the return of the Same is always questioned by his adherence to the mystery, to the new, to symbolism and to the world as becoming through the creative possibilities of the body as imagination, that is, as unknowable. We can create the ecstatic body, love's body that we never knew we had. I want to conclude this chapter by sifting through some of these apparent paradoxes in the critical dialogue in *Commentary* between Marcuse and Brown. This, I would suggest, comes down to the difference between a teleology that reduces otherness to the process of history and an eschatology that may yet be radically other—in fact depends upon it.

A productive starting point is the difference between a 'totality' of mediated differences and a 'unity' or original co-belonging. Marcuse defines his relationship to totality in the following way:

in dialectical logic the whole is the truth, but a whole in which all parts and divisions have their place and stage. The relations between them, their specific function, the different levels and modes of reality, its inner development must be demonstrated and defined—only then, in the unending and subverting stream of mediations, appears the true as the bacchanalian whirl:⁴⁴ sober drunkenness of the whole: Reason and Freedom. Critical, not absolute vision; a new rationality, not the simple negation of rationality.

(*Neg*: 241)

The kind of clear-eyed critical inebriation desired by Marcuse is enthused by the rarefied atmosphere of Hegelian dialectics. The idea that in the light of reason the phenomenal world will fall into serried ranks and be amenable to negation and mediation, and will be universalised through critical practice. However, this logic positions itself between the ‘unending’ and the ‘whole’, one of which, it would seem, must subvert the other. This antinomy arises because Marcuse’s new rationality is based upon his new sensibility, where sensual affects—from perversion to surrealism—are seen as the ‘subverting stream of mediations’ which can inspire critical evaluation. But, Marcuse circumscribes the *negative* authority of art, taking it away from the ‘real’—and thus, for a Hegelian, away from the ‘rational.’ This, as we saw, is the dualistic legacy of his Kantianism. This is not to say that his new rationality is the sober ‘science’ of positivism, for it admits to occasional drunkenness and erring desires; indeed, it is arguably not even reducible to the Enlightenment program as it stood from Kant to Freud. Nevertheless, to paraphrase Castoriadis, it still lays out the body of its inquiry upon the slab—it ‘murders to dissect.’

The imagination, like the unconscious, remains a critical resource for Marcuse, but only in that it reflects the deviations from the path of a long established emancipatory program—it is always returned to the Same (the role of imagination is mediation,

⁴⁴ This Hegelian idea of truth as a Bacchanalian whirl (G. W. F. Hegel [trans. A. V. Miller], *Phenomenology of Spirit*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], p. 27), stimulates, at some level, the arguments of Marcuse,

not mystification, that the imagination may be mystified is a privative condition—its strength and its weakness). Such differences as are discovered can be measured, and even enforced, for they are the method by which history itself is measured, and from which meaning is ultimately derived.

[W]thin the *historical* universe (the only one that, in any meaningful sense, can ever be the universe of freedom and fulfillment), *there are divisions and boundaries that are real and will continue to exist even in the advent of freedom and fulfillment, because all pleasure and all happiness and all humanity originate and live in and with these divisions and boundaries.* Such are the division into sexes, the difference between the male and female, the penis and the vagina, between you and me, even between mine and thine, and they are, or can

be, most enjoyable and most gratifying divisions; their abolition would be not only illusion but nightmare—the acme of repression.
(*Neg.* 236; emphases added)

History (as *Geschichte*), then, is a history of division, begun in division and fulfilled in division: sexes, genitals, self and other and, perhaps curiously, property, are the sufficient and abiding causes of history. That there are divisions and boundaries is beyond doubt, *but* that this primary stratum determines what we call history and freedom is very much in doubt. They rest on a minimal repressive structure which, in responding to the tensions of Anankē, give shape and definition to the ‘world.’ ‘Suffering—after all’, as Dostoyevsky wrote, ‘is the sole cause of consciousness.’⁴⁵ But, as is implicit in both Kant and Castoriadis, there must be something prior to suffering and need in order to be able to register them at all (there must be conditions for the possibility of suffering). Lack cannot be the first determinate of subjectivity and objectivity, though it may be the first ‘meaningful event,’ because something must exist which can both ‘lack and be lacked.’

This *a priori* ‘structure,’ impossible to determine from a gradualist approach, which Kant recognises in his transcendental psychology and Castoriadis calls the psychical monad, is the scene, mentioned above, within which the drama of primary lack is played out, the fort/da game of connection and disconnection of the monad, which is everything, and in which everything is ‘subject.’ The first sense of objectivity is the hallucination, and this primary hallucination, in which subjectivity is always returned to (a mythical) oceanic plenitude, Castoriadis argues, is the radical imagination, which accompanies all representations. It is both unique and total, a oneness which is everything. In

⁴⁵ Fyodor Dostoyevsky (trans. J. Coulson), *Notes from the Underground/The Double* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 41.

this sense, it is *division* that is artificial, always secondary, and the unconscious truth is not mediation but im-mediation, in both the negative and the positive senses of the word. If, for Marcuse, the reduction of boundaries is the ‘acme of repression’, Castoriadis argues that a more potent archaic (pre-representative) power is in operation that requires *qua* phantasy and the radical imagination that boundaries be overcome (the insistent demand of the fragment as *praxis* and *poiesis*). So particular boundaries are not, here, repressive structures *per se* as Brown argues, but they are the framework around which repressive structures are accreted as the ‘subject’ is brought into contact with the ‘world.’ Boundaries correspond to the always *secondary* institution of subjectivity by the social (oedipus, etc.); they lean upon the first natural stratum but are, as always, irreducible to its rational mediation. The ‘loss’ of the breast, for example, may be a biological-corporeal event, but its *meaning* in the oral drive is not. Just as the anal drive does not arise from the anus, but from the position of the faeces in the first economy between ‘mother’ and ‘child’ (*IIS*: 317). This representative organization of the drives is imaginatively imposed upon, not inherent in, the somatic disturbances of the body as it is traced by lack. And the boundaries that emerge from this social-somatic regulation resonate with their origin in the phantasies of unity that trace the proto-structure of representations. There are, then, no boundaries in the radical imagination, which is why, ultimately (recalling Freud’s friend, R), symbolism is possible.

Thus, as we have seen, the origins of affect and intention are one, and the initial hallucinatory satisfactions developed by the psyche to cover its lacks are proto-words. That is, that which ‘stands’ for something it is not (Kant’s ‘hypotyposes’ at the origin of subjectivity). Unconscious representations, though not strictly symbols, because they are not actually at a remove from what they represent (because they are affect) are however,

the ground for conscious symbolism (*HIS*: 142), because they recall the co-belonging of the affects which lead to the social economy of words. The origin of symbolism, then, is the hallucinatory undivided imagination-affect-intention of monadic phantasy. Therefore, when Brown speaks of the need to understand the body as *unity*, or co-belonging, and appeals to symbolism and mystery rather than ‘totality,’ he is not slipping into the ‘darkness’ of repression but showing a keen understanding of where radical psychoanalysis can lead, and, more to the point, where it is coming from. Which is to mystery, to the anti-sublime which disrupts the Enlightenment myth of gendered conquest and illumination.

‘The great whore,’ Brown writes, ironically, ‘is to be stripped. Her name is Mystery; to see her naked is to destroy the mystery. The mystery of sex is the mystery of kingship. *The mystery is the deception, the non-existent penis*’ (*LB*: 76; emphasis added). This is an exemplary moment of the anti-sublime, rejecting reason’s self-assertion over the loss of meaning. Compare Kant: ‘Perhaps nothing more sublime has ever been said, or any thought more sublimely expressed, than in the inscription over the temple of *Isis* (Mother *Nature*): “I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and my veil no mortal has removed”’ (*CJ*: 194; Kant’s emphasis). The sublime is a way of protecting oneself from the absolute mystery of nature and the attendant failure of the understanding. Brown wants to erase the clichés of the Enlightenment and to retrieve the mystery from the gendered metaphors of conquest. For him the signifier of difference, the absent penis, is a deception. It is that minimal difference upon which the imaginary leans and which hides the more radical alterity of the magma/manifold/void/*chora*: the surplus that includes all possible ensidic determinations, and on which this chapter opened.

The pleasure that Marcuse locates in boundaries, that is, the pleasure of sex (genital or polymorphous), then, does not originate in boundaries but in the overcoming of the minimal repression consequent upon their dissolution. One section of *Love's Body* is called 'Boundary,' and in it Brown takes the understanding of the body politic as genital organ(-)ization, which he develops in the opening sections of the book, and removes the power of creating the 'body' away from the social as causal. He reflects instead upon a Blakean vision of the body as mutable, contingent upon the imagination as that which overcomes boundaries. His 'symbol' is the schizophrenic.

Schizophrenic thought is 'adualistic'; lack of ego-boundaries makes it impossible to set limits to the process of identification with the environment. The schizophrenic world is one of mystical participation; and 'indescribable extension of inner sense'; 'uncanny feelings of reference'; occult psychosomatic influences and powers; currents of electricity, or sexual attraction—action at a distance.

(LB: 159)

Schizophrenia is here a *symbol* of divine madness that belongs to poetry (Crazy Jane). Brown is not valorising a disease, but promoting the truth found in its symptoms ('The proper posture is to listen to and learn from the lunatics, as in former times' [LB: 160]). The schizophrenic is the result of the failure to cross from imagination to *representation*; to emerge, that is, from the radical imagination as archetype, and thus is *the* symbol of symbolism. It figures the co-belonging at the heart of being—but only as emptiness and insanity. It is an extension or ecstasis of 'inner-sense,' Kant's temporal faculty and stable point of the 'I.' Schizophrenia, in these terms, is the failure to enter ensidic time which points to what ontological time, or time as alterity, 'is.' Consequently, symbolism is not only adualistic, it is *acausal*: 'Events are related to other events not by causality, but by analogy and correspondence. In the archetype is exemplary causality, *causa exemplaris*'

(LB: 209). Which is not, I think, to say that it is atemporal, because whilst Brown consistently attacks any idea of time as persistence or duration, he remains open to it as creativity and as activity. Time itself becomes a series of analogies, a mythical schema. ‘Reality,’ he writes, ‘does not consist of substances, solidly and stolidly each in its own place; but in events, activity; activity which crosses the boundary; action at a distance’ (LB: 155).

We are led beyond any idea of what Brown calls, following Whitehead, ‘Simple Location,’ the premise of the reality principle and of ensidic logic, and into the idea of the body as manifold, ecstatic and unknowable. As he writes in the section ‘Head’:

The revolutionary idea in psychoanalysis is the idea of the body as a (political) organization, a body politic; as a historical variable; as plastic. Man makes himself, his own Body; his image of the body; the Eternal body of Man is the imagination.

(LB: 127)

The shape of the physical body is a mystery, the inner dynamical shape, the real centers of energy and their interrelation; the mystical body which is not to be arrived at by anatomical dissection and mechanical analysis; the symbolical life of the body, with which psychoanalysis can put us in touch.

(LB: 136)

In *Love’s Body*, the value of psychoanalysis is not in therapy but in that it presents the body as mystery and symbol. It eludes the scalpels wielded by the reality principle and which constitute the myth of inside and outside, where, to paraphrase Brown’s citation of Gaston Bachelard, alienation begins (LB: 144). The two principles of mental functioning, reality and phantasy, are reduced to their common origin in the one: phantasy, which is prior to the divisionist myth which disavows its mythical status. This false body, ‘the separate self,’ dreamt up by ‘Two Horn’d Reasoning, Cloven Fiction’ (Blake)

must be cast off 'in order to begin the Odyssey of consciousness in quest of its own true body' (*LB*: 154).

Castoriadis understands this very well. Reason, as the principle of ensidic comprehension of the world, emerges out of the unity of initial autism. The *desire* of reason is to unify, quantify and rationalise the world into the minimum amount of categories; to understand it in a single expression, be it the grand unifying theory that brings together relativity and quantum mechanics (or the Talmud), or the word of God, is born of 'the monster of unifying madness' (*IIS*: 298). The initial autism of the monad which is for Castoriadis the origin of the need 'to find across difference and otherness, manifestations of the *same*' (*IIS*: 299), a madness of unification that is the beginning of rationality. Earlier I called it 'the narcissism of the understanding,' here it is the search for a final unity based on the ultimate authority of a primary One. The paradox of reason in part unveiled here is that in seeking to separate out the world in order to categorise, and progress, the desire is still to regress. In the end it is only the irreducible otherness, alien to totality in either its primary (monadic) or mature (ensidic) forms, that keeps the desire going, forbids reason from obtaining closure, and thus, in some sense, satisfies it: 'Man is not a rational animal, as the old commonplace affirms. Nor is he a sick animal. Man is a mad animal (who begins by being mad) and who, for this reason as well, becomes or can become rational' (*IIS*: 299).

Thus, the boundaries erected to define mine and thine, self and other within the inherited logic are neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause. Marcuse's claim that Eros, the life instinct, 'lives in the division and boundary between subject and object, man and nature' (*Neg*: 238) here steps right into the breach created by the paradox of reason as the unifying madness. For Freud's Eros wants to dissolve boundaries, to bring ever

greater unities, but as was shown in Chapter 2, Eros actually thrives on difference, on the gradient between self and other, but only as an *expansion* of the self. So Marcuse writes against himself, and Brown responds: ‘the abolition of genital organization, foretold by Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*, turns out to mean what Marcuse calls [in his critique of *Love’s Body*] the impossible unity and union of everything’ (*Neg.* 237). The boundaries are the space of expansion, the co-belonging that abolishes all property in the self. Brown argues that Marcuse’s defence of property in the self: ‘a factor and ingredient of true freedom (Marx knew it well): that which is properly mine because I am different from you and can be with and for you only in this difference—boundaries to be enjoyed by you and me’ (*Neg.* 237), is merely a placation of the establishment, and he turns Marcuse’s criticism around.

What needs to be reiterated is not reassurance to the bourgeois that he will be able to carry his little old Self, Person, and Property into that world [of Communism/Communion], but that the kingdom of heaven on earth is possible; and that other world, the negation of this jungle, cannot possibly be anything except *Communitas*. A higher form of chaos; instead of confusion, fusion.

(*Neg.* 245)

Love’s Body sees the ‘next world’ in the present, sees it in communism, radical (Dionysian) Christianity (Blake, Boehme), philosophy, poetry, psychoanalysis. It lies in the co-belonging of symbolism not in the mistaken solidity of substance ontology: ‘Reality is not in things (dead matter, or heavy stuff), in simple location. Reality is energy, or instinct; Eros and Thanatos...the human body is not a thing or substance, given, but a continuous creation’ (*LB.* 155).

The body is the mystery of the world unveiling itself through symbols. It is not to be read off in measurements or understood by the scientist, but in the marriage of

idealism, mysticism and psychoanalysis: ‘combining to make us conscious of our unconscious participation in the creation of the phenomenal world.’ For, ‘To become conscious of our participation in the creation of the phenomenal world is to pass from passive experience—perception as impression on a passive mind—to conscious creation, and creative freedom’ (*LB*: 255). That is, the positive idealism or romanticism that we saw in Emerson—with all its attendant difficulties and its naïveté: the frailty of the fragmentary project. And this, perhaps, is where the ultimate critique of Marcuse lies. Brown does not dismiss the possibility of appearance becoming reality. Rather, he enjoins it to do so—this is what critical idealism means for him—and in doing this, he asserts the kind of *secular divinity* that we find in Emerson and in the romantics in general.

For Brown the negation of theism is not atheism or the faith of science, but divinity in human form, to deify the mortal contribution to the creation of the (phenomenal) world. ‘God is not Freud’s God Logos, abstract or disembodied Reason, but the human form divine’ (*Neg*: 246). This apotheosis relies on an acceptance of the void as the other of the world: ‘The obstacle to incarnation is our horror of the void.’ (*LB*: 262). In *Love’s Body* he writes ‘The world is a veil we spin to hide the void,’ (*LB*: 261) and the nothing, the ‘utopia,’ that lies on the other side of the veil is the negation of the institution of the world. A necessarily transient institution because ‘[f]reedom is instability’ (*LB*: 260), an instability that announces itself in the breach of the veil, allowing new meanings to erupt. The void (in Castoriadis’s terms the temporal alterity of the magma) is for Brown (and he could almost have read Castoriadis here): ‘A pregnant emptiness. Object-loss, world-loss, is the preconditions for all creation. Creation is out of the void; *ex nihilo*’ (*LB*: 262). Symbolism, metaphor, can only exist because the world is originally

without meaning, is empty. This is necessarily the reversal of Marcuse's Hegelian position where the world strives towards its meaning through human history.

Where Brown exceeds Castoriadis is in his ideas of resurrection, revelation and revolution, which he equates with a characteristic awareness that none of these words can be used together and maintain their current meanings. 'Revolution', he writes in his response to Marcuse, 'is not a slate wiped clean, but a revolving cycle. Even newness is renewal. As it was in the beginning. The idea of progress is in question' (*Neg*: 243). Indeed it should be argued that his use of these words together is as much to do with alliteration (a somatic co-belonging, tripping off the tongue) as it is with either a psychoanalytic or philosophical truth. In fact, in the last analysis Brown does not distinguish between the two.

From politics to poetry. Poetry, art, is not an epiphenomenal reflection of some other (political, economic) realm which is the 'real thing'; nor still a contemplation of something else which is the 'real action'; not a sublimation of something else which is the 'real,' carnal 'act.' Poetry, art, imagination, the creator spirit is life itself; the real revolutionary power to change the world; and to change the human body.

(Neg: 246)

To see the world aesthetically is not, for Brown, a narrow artistic sensibility as it is for Marcuse, but to recognise how people partake of the creation of their world from out of the 'mystery.' Thus through his praxis—which is poiesis—he oversteps Marcuse's aesthetics, blending the world of politics with the world of poetry. This is clearly a very different kind of politics in which there are no liberal undertones or calls for social democracy. The truth, as Brown makes very clear in his Phi Beta Kappa address of 1960, 'Apocalypse: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind', is not democratic. Science, he argues, is the attempt to democratise knowledge, to 'substitute method for insight,

mediocrity for genius, by getting a standard operating procedure' (*AM*: 4). Real insight, however, is necessarily esoteric, it is neither publishable nor republican—a thing of the people. The kind of knowledge Brown seeks emerges from the 'sovereign power of the [romantic] imagination...which makes poets the unacknowledged legislators of mankind, the power which makes all things new' (*AM*: 4). This is the mystery of the aboriginal self, *beyond* the sense of wonder (a derivative state of the sublime), the acknowledged source of the dual ensidic academic disciplines of philosophy and science. It is the mystery of the new, the radically other, which cannot be mediated by but only mystify the imagination. It is a mystery that Brown discloses when he accepts that 'Everything is metaphor; there is only poetry,' (*LB*: 66) the meaning of which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

—Chapter Five—

**The Poetry of Origins and the Origins of Poetry:
Norman O. Brown and Giambattista Vico**

Norman O. Brown closes *Love's Body* with the phrase 'there is only poetry' (*LB*: 266), and though the last chapter has gone some way to disclosing and defending this position through an ontological interpretation of the imagination, it is necessary to take one last turn through Brown's labyrinth, revealing another significant level of his poetic understanding and drive for an 'erotic sense of reality' (*LB*: 81). This next twist comes from the confluence of the historical poetics presented in Giambattista Vico's *New Science* (1744), and James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), in Brown's *Closing Time* (1973). I shall use the deliberate chiasmus in this chapter's title to explore the Viconian idea of *ricorso*, which, 'by a commodius vicus of recirculation',¹ brings Brown back to consider the poetry of origins and the origins of poetry explicated in Vico's philosophy. This chiasmatic movement, I argue, follows Brown's bold step that collapses the categorial distance between epistemology and ontology, knowing and being, understanding and making—and returns them to the corporeal, to love's body. By this I want to show how thinkers like Brown and Marcuse have taught that people are too eager to give away the work of their *own* imagination, to mathematics, to science, to religion, to fancy, etc. The authority of the imagination needs to be retrieved as the site of freedom and the origin of truth. Also we might reflect on Santayana's words: 'Men become superstitious not because they have too much imagination, but because they are not aware that they have any.'²

¹ Norman O. Brown, *Closing Time* (New York: Vintage, 1974 [1973]) p. 26. Hereafter referred to as *CT* in the text where appropriate; James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 3. Hereafter referred to as *FW* in the text where appropriate. Brown's collage like work uses a large amount of citation, as such I shall reference all relevant sources.

² George Santayana, cited by A. C. Grayling, *The Guardian* (22nd April, 2000).

This chapter will unfold in three distinct phases; each anchored by a line from *Closing Time*. The first is the reprise from *Love's Body* of the phrase 'there is only poetry,' (CT: 79), which I shall read as a compressed summation of Vico's 'Poetic Logic.' This discloses the dominance of metaphor in early human cultures from which Vico argues that later language is derived. This section will also develop several themes from previous chapters: the role of the 'imagination' (*fantasia*); the body as measure and metaphor; and the ontogenesis and phylogenesis of linguistic beings—which we have already seen in Freud and Schiller. In addition, I shall examine the Viconian mode of poetic knowledge. The second section emerges from the hermetic line: 'we take refuge in the Void, the Nothing' (CT: 57). Here I want to bring out the 'nihilistic' claims of Brown's book which takes Vico's thought beyond rationalism, beyond even its own extensive claims, but which does not, necessarily, step outside of the 'logic' it establishes. This will include Vico's powerful critique of Cartesianism, his equally cogent attack upon *essentialist* humanism and his assertion of a purely linguistic ontology which, in at least one interpretation attaches itself to a provocative, I shall argue nihilistic, metaphysics of presence. The last section, engages with the ludic phrase, 'Two books get on top of each other and become sexual' (CT: ix), and treats Brown's own methodology. How he puts the lessons learned from Vico and Joyce to work in his short but complex and allusive book. Here I look at the formal 'collage' techniques of the work and the knowledge claims they produce, or do not produce. Also, the approach to a mythical revivification of language and at the way Joyce is mustered as an exemplary 'passage *through* nihilism.' The first steps in this work were taken in *Love's Body*, where 'nothing' does not disclose our helplessness, but rather the creative authority of the romantic imagination—the mystery that there is 'something' at all. The last step is another reprise, this time of Brown's mythic poetics,

which restates and inverts his prior stance on the relationship between the vernacular or democratic language, and the priority of the ‘mystery’: *ricorso*.

Because of the nature of Brown’s book, which even more so than *Love’s Body* consists of the juxtaposition of quotation, it is impossible to understand without a long and challenging reading of the *New Science*. This means that throughout the first two sections of this chapter there is a necessary reversal of figure and ground, where discussion of Vico takes precedence. But this is only to return to *Closing Time* with an informed picture of its operation as a text.

I

There is, then, to begin with at least—though what Brown might mean here by ‘beginning’ is yet to be established—only poetry. Here I shall address just how Brown draws this remarkable conclusion and in what way is it confirmed, or rather anticipated, in Vico’s *New Science*. The focal point of this relationship is the precedence of metaphor, not just as a way of describing the world, and certainly not as a secondary affectation, but as a primary and directly sensual³ response to the given. It may be helpful to quote the whole fragment, the last in *Love’s Body*,⁴ from which the guiding phrase of this section comes, and compare it to its place in *Closing Time*.

The antinomy between mind and body, word and deed, speech and silence, overcome. Everything is metaphor; there is only poetry.

(LB: 266)

³ Or ‘natural’ in the nuanced Viconian sense of the word I shall outlined below.

⁴ At least the last words written by Brown, it is followed by a quotation from Govinda’s *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (1959).

Man is his own maker
 maker or creator
 creator of poet

'Poets,' which is Greek for 'creators.'

NS, 376

The making is poetry
Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch auf dieser Erde
 there is only poetry
 the key to *The New Science* is poetry

Hölderlin,
 Heidegger
Love's Body, 266

(*CT*: 79)

In *Love's Body*, metaphor becomes virtually synonymous with poetry, and it forms, or tries to form, a perfect (hermeneutic) circle which overcomes, sublates, the distinctions upon which modern thought is predicated. *Closing Time* carries this forward, and there is a further evolution in both the typographical form of the page, which now reads rather like a list, and in an increasingly paratactic use of the fragment. Whereas *Love's Body*, strove to find a kind of lyricism that centred around metaphors of the body, the 'poetry' of *Closing Time* is, arguably, more immediate; almost a 'found' poetry of juxtaposition. Brown is still working within the context of a kind of symphilosophy, but he is moving, as we shall see at the end of this chapter, one step further *toward* language as originary rather than the body,⁵ and this is reflected in the form of the book.

Another theme from *Love's Body*, reprised in *Closing Time*, is the apocalyptic. As Brown confirms in his own comments on the later work, just prior to its release, he is concerned with the question 'what time is it?'⁶ The answer is obviously given in the book's title. But its authority comes from the cycle of history that Vico lays out in his *New Science*. This runs from a poetic time of Gods, through to an age of heroes where

⁵ As is apparent from the reference to the late Heidegger. See, Martin Heidegger, '...Poetically Man Dwells...' in (trans. Albert Hofstadter), *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 211-229. Perhaps a tentative reading might suggest a movement in Brown's thought from the body to that of language as the ecstatic horizon of our 'dwelling.'

⁶ Norman O. Brown 'Rieff's "Fellow Teachers"' (*Salmugundi*, No. 24, Fall 1973, pp. 34-45), p. 35. Hereafter referred to as FT in the text.

individuals take on the characteristics of the Gods, that is, an aristocracy, and to the age of men, or democracy. This last age, Vico argues records the loss of the Gods. From this loss men relapse into the earliest period of barbarism—they become poetic again. Brown's point is that this barbarism is upon us, announced by Hölderlin and Nietzsche, and reflected in thinkers like Heidegger and Joyce. For, he argues, 'only barbarians are simple-minded enough to recognize the gods' (FT: 39), and 'simple' does not mean stupid, but rather whole or discrete, partaking completely of their world. As such, the barbarians can become aware of the willed construction of their own Gods—which, in the secular vision peculiar to *Closing Time*, is the Blakean deification of humanity. I shall look closely at this below and see with just what kind of 'divinity' Brown is concerned. But first it is necessary to outline in detail Vico's approach to metaphor and to the 'poetic' (rather than poetry *per se* as a formal device), and so to delve into the origins of Brown's claims and, simultaneously, the Viconian origins of language.

Brown is explicitly restating Vico's main contention when he writes, "The origin of language in fantasy, not in reality" (CT: 72). Fantasy for Brown, as it was in *Love's Body*, is necessarily indistinguishable from the imagination; indeed, it is a translation of the Italian '*fantasia*,' which Vico uses to mean 'imagination.'⁷ The unique distinction of the imagination for Vico, and more importantly for Brown, is that the imagination is the faculty through which the early or 'primitive' peoples conceived the world and gave it 'linguistic,' or rather 'symbolic,' shape and meaning. This leads to two imaginative

⁷ From this and other developments it should gradually become apparent why Vico has been seen by many as a forerunner of idealist and romantic philosophical systems. Indeed he has been seen as a romantic *avant la lettre*, for example: Benedetto Croce (trans. R. G. Collingwood), *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), *passim*; hereafter referred to as *PGV* in the text; Isaiah Berlin (ed. Henry Hardy), *Three Critiques of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (London: Pimlico, 2000), *passim*; hereafter referred to as *TCE* in the text; and A. Robert Caponigri, whose often 'obscure' ideas *apropos* of this I shall be discussing in the second section of this chapter. All of these commentators' ideas are drawn on in what follows.

modes: that of an originary creating or imaginative being and that of a ‘reconstructive’ historical knowing, which are, for Vico, necessarily deeply integrated.

So-called ‘primitive’ peoples are described by Vico as being: ‘simple and crude, and [who, acting] under the powerful spell of the most vigorous imaginations encumbered with frightful superstition, actually believed that they saw the gods on earth.’⁸ Vico’s sense of history is anachronistic, proscribed as it is by the Biblical account of Genesis which only gave him about six and a half thousand years of history and it is encumbered in particular by the flood, which he makes a central motif of his reconstruction. However, his philosophical insights are as remote from the Catholic orthodoxy of eighteenth century Italy as they are from the new rationalism (often called the ‘new science’) that had emerged with Bacon, Galileo and Descartes a century earlier, and certainly merit isolating from his more fantastic ideas. In Vico’s time the general trend, even within the nascent Enlightenment, was to believe in the ‘matchless wisdom of the ancients’ from which modern humanity has regressed, and which was only just beginning to be regained during and after the Renaissance.⁹ But for Vico, on the contrary, early peoples were crude and ‘vulgar’ (that is, common), all sensuality and little reason—and this included the ancient (pre-Socratic) Greeks and the founding Romans. By his remarkably elaborate reckoning (the word often used is ‘baroque’), after the world was destroyed by the great flood, it was populated for the next two-hundred years with ignorant giants, growing vast and strong on the nitrous salts of their own excrement in which they unthinkingly wallowed whilst shamelessly fornicating with kin and stranger alike. The

⁸ Giambattista Vico (trans. T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch), *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1984 [1744]), §3. Hereafter referred to as *NS* in the text. I shall follow the conventions of Viconian scholarship and cite quotations and comments by paragraph number.

⁹ For a more general context of the conflict between the ancients and moderns see Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, Vol. II: The Science of Freedom* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970), pp. 96, 124–125.

only nation unaffected by this monstrosity was, according to the *New Science*, the Jews, whose scriptural adherence to cleanliness kept them of human proportions and relatively culturally advanced. However, the Jews are not the subject of the *New Science*.¹⁰ It is concerned mainly with the offspring of the Gentile giants, the sons of ‘Ham and Japheth [who] were destined to be scattered through the great forests of this earth in a savage migration of two hundred years’ (*NS*: 62)—the original diaspora.

What is of interest to me, however, is not the details of Vico’s reconstruction of history but the *method* by which he achieves it. This is based on the assertion that the first peoples were ‘sublime poets,’ in his specific (pre-Kantian) sense of the term, and that this sublimity was attendant upon their savagery, not upon their wisdom. Poetry emerges as the first and most vital of three linguistically defined human relationships to the world, as a necessary first comprehension and contemplation of it and the things in it. He writes, ‘Men at first feel without perceiving.... This axiom is the principle of the poetic sentences, which are formed by feelings of passions and emotion...’ (*NS*: 218-219). Poetry corresponds to this first stage of development, which is sensuous and unreflective, felt without perceptiveness. Civilization originates here because of a shared vocabulary of what Vico calls ‘imaginative universals’ (I will return to these) and later, more sophisticated linguistic forms and their corresponding abstract rather than sensuous thought patterns, are derived from it. This first stage is, in essence, the mode of metaphor: the direct unmediated (but by no means ‘essential’) connection between ‘things’ which gives rise to a primal vocabulary, more gestural than vocal, more symbolic than articulate. We have, of course, just seen this in *Love’s Body* where for Brown metaphor

¹⁰ The Jewish people and their Christian descendants are authorized culturally not by the imagination but by revelation—as such they stand outside of the main methodological insights of interest to me in the *New Science*.

arises from an originary co-belonging in primary narcissism; an argument that found support in Castoriadis theory that the very first ‘words’ contained both intention and affect. Thus, again, there is a phylo- and ontogenetic repetition.

Metaphor emerges from what Vico considers an indissociable link between the emotions and senses of the subject as they respond to the movements of his or her environment, which are confusing, and potentially alienating. For Vico, this affective imaginative association constitutes the origin of the ‘primitive’ thought processes which he calls ‘Poetic Wisdom’ and to which he gives over more than half of his *New Science*. Vico sums up this bodily motivation for metaphor in the following axioms: ‘Because of the indefinite nature of the human mind, wherever it is lost in ignorance, man makes himself the measure of all things’ (*NS*: 120); and: ‘It is another property of the human mind that whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar and at hand’ (*NS*: 122). These two underpinning laws of corporeal metaphor, ignorance and distance (that is, everything unknown is judged by what is closest at hand), form the understanding of the poetic character of early peoples. They establish Vico’s point that it is from the *poverty* of reason and the robustness of the ‘primitive’ imagination that poetry emerges as a ‘natural’ and *necessary* form of knowledge. But this is not, as we shall see, some kind of associationism, but rather a linguistic ontology based on the body. Thus, the cause of this direct and emotive discourse is that from the first, as Brown argues in his dispute with Marcuse, ‘the human body is the measure of all things’ (*Neg*: 245). It is the absolute origin of the metaphorical interpretation of the world.

Vico makes great claims for this ‘discovery,’ and considers ‘the principle [that the] origins both of languages and of letters lies in the fact that the early gentile peoples,

by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic characters' to be the 'master key of [his] Science' (*NS*: 34). It stands as the background to Vico's way of understanding ancient peoples, which is again stated as an axiom: 'the universal principle of etymology in all languages: words are carried over from bodies and the properties of bodies to express the things of the mind and the spirit' (*NS*: 237). This seems to compare favourably to Brown's readings of Luther and Swift that were mentioned in Chapter 3. But these 'sublime' moments are not, I think, sublimations, but rather the creation of symbolism *ex nihilo*.

The important corollary of this for Vico and for all subsequent historicism is that ancient peoples and lost cultures can also be *reconstructed*, imaginatively, from their extant languages and artefacts. These will contain, he argues, the 'precise' relationship, necessarily imaginary, between those peoples and their world. Vico's poetics is, in this sense, an historical method. Isaiah Berlin sums this up as follows.

Fantasia is for Vico a way of conceiving the process of social change and growth by correlating it with, indeed viewing it as conveyed by, the parallel change or development of the symbolism by which men seek to express it; since the symbolic structures are themselves part and parcel of the reality which they symbolise, and alter with it. This method of discovery, which begins with understanding the means of expression, and seeks to reach the vision of reality which they presuppose and articulate, is a kind of transcendental deduction (in the Kantian sense)¹¹ of historical truth. It is a method of arriving not, as hitherto, at an unchanging reality via its changing appearances, but at a changing reality—men's history—through its systematically changing modes of expression.

(*TCE*: 11-12)

¹¹ I.e., rather than being deduced from the constant 'facts' or 'evidence,' Vico makes what he believes to be necessary presuppositions (Kant calls these 'transcendental deductions', i.e., they do not arise from experience, but are necessary for experience) in order for the understanding of history to be possible at all.

The imagination, then, is the motive force in the forward dynamic between peoples and nature and as such is reflected directly in the linguistic documents they inadvertently leave to historians. It consists in a kind of ‘dialectical’ progression, though Vico would not have used that term, between word, or symbol, and ‘reality,’ and which asserts the ideal relation between the two. The historian is able to access this dynamic relationship through a difficult and arduous imaginative reconstruction of it in documentary research. For Vico history is recoverable precisely *because* it is essentially imaginative, that is poetic.

Historians prior to, and many subsequent to, Vico have tended to dismiss the imagination, seeing it as an irremediable legacy of the irrational. Descartes, for example, argues that ‘they who wish to use their imagination to understand [God and the soul] are doing just the same as if, to hear sounds or smell odours, they attempted to use their eyes.’¹² Moreover, Descartes’ crushing critique of history in general (that, for example, it would give no more information on the last days of Rome than would have been available to Cicero’s housemaid [*TCE*: 30]) was, arguably, the dominant view in the eighteenth century. For Vico, though, the discovery of the poetic origin of language and of human history was more than equal to its rationalist critiques. It provided a positive method that led directly to our primitive origins. It also enabled him to understand not only their language, but also their metaphysics, these being in essence the same thing.

From these men, stupid, insensate, and horrible beasts, all the philosophers and philologists should have begun their investigation of the wisdom of the ancient gentiles; that is, from the giants in the proper sense in which we have taken them.... *And they should have begun with metaphysics which seeks proofs not in the external world but within the modifications of the mind who meditates it.* For since this world of nations has been made by men, it is within these modifications that its principles should have been sought.

(*NS*: 374; emphasis added)

¹² René Descartes (trans. F. E. Sutcliffe), *Discourse on Method and the Meditations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 57.

This passage contains one of the most important methodological principle of the *New Science*. The historian should not seek knowledge in the ‘external’ world, in facts and data about objects, but in the ‘inner’ world or in the modifications of the mind of the primitive person as he or she develops. That is, in the altering symbolic structures that codify and give meaning to actions in time. The sum of these actions is, for Vico, history. Thus, to a certain extent, the first history is an ‘intellectual history’—moreover, it is an idealism.

Understanding of this process may be helped by an example that brings the foregoing together: the human creation of the first gentile God, Jove, which in turn becomes the model for Brown’s return of the Gods. In Vico’s imaginative reconstruction of early religion, Jove is an anthropomorphic construction, arising as a response to ‘primitive’ ignorance, for that of which people are ignorant they substitute what they do know and that *invariably* is the body. Vico tells the story of the post-diluvian giants who had never before heard thunder (because after the flood the air was too wet to produce any ‘dry exhalations’¹³ for two-hundred years) and were affected by a great fear when the thunder finally came.

And because in such a case the nature of the human mind leads it to attribute its own nature to the effect, and because in that state their nature was that of men all robust bodily strength, who expressed their very violent passions by shouting and grumbling, they picture the sky to themselves as a great animated body, which is that aspect they call Jove, the first god of the so-called greater gentes, who meant to tell them something by the hiss of his bolts and the clap of his thunder.... And so they make all nature a vast animate body which feels passions and affections.

(NS: 377)

¹³ ‘We postulate, and the postulate is reasonable, that for several hundred years the earth, soaked by the water of the universal flood, sent forth no dry exhalations or matter capable of igniting the air to produce lightning.’ (NS: 192)

Jove becomes an archetype, an ‘imaginative universal,’ for all things which are animate or make noises and which can be directly related, in an exaggerated manner, to the sensible movements of the human body. Indeed, it is this very exaggeration which makes the ‘cause’ of the sky, and of thunder in particular, an immortal being. For if the vast giants make so much noise when they are angry, then the primitive poets could only imagine how vast must be the ‘being’ who makes the sound of thunder. In this way, without diverging from their metaphorical metaphysics, early men came to see all of nature as symbolic of the greater god, Jove—in Latin, *ius omni*, ‘God in everything.’

These first people were animists: those who attribute to the natural world the signification affects of people: ‘the first men, who spoke by signs, naturally believed that lightning bolts and thunderclaps were signs made to them by Jove; whence from *nuo*, to make a sign, came *numen*, the divine will, by an idea more than sublime and worthy to express divine majesty’ (*NS*: 379). This was the origin of poetry in Vico’s sense, as well as the beginning of primitive reflection that in that time was a literal reflection of the person themselves with little or no abstract reason. Early peoples were ‘theological poets.’ As Vico puts it: ‘Thus it was fear which created gods in the world; not fear awakened in men by other men, but fear awakened in men by themselves’ (*NS*: 382). Because of this, Hayden White argues that though the historian may be able to look back upon this time as a plenum, where the human imagination, seeing the reflection of its own sensuality in nature, made of nature its gods, this was a position driven by ignorance and fear.¹⁴ The failure of the early gentiles to recognise the subjectivity of their objectifica-

¹⁴ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 203. Hereafter referred to as *Tropics* in the text.

tion of nature leaves them in a position of alienation; and Vico was, arguably, the first philosopher to recognise this implicitly as the fundamental state of humanity. Men and women are both the causes of their own entrapment *and* the potential for their own emancipation.¹⁵ The richness of this idea for Romantic philosophy, and for Marxism and Existentialism can scarcely be exaggerated.¹⁶

Vico's anachronistic stories aside, his methodology stripped down to its basic principles, which Brown appropriates, remains very powerful, because it makes the world and its history from the human response to it. The gradual coming to self-consciousness of that response and the reflexivity which comes with it are a necessary part of Vico's science—almost one hundred years before Hegel suggested a very similar thing. But the emphasis on the linguistic and the internal modifications of the mind take Vico away from Hegel. For Vico, as for Kant an important part of the world remains unknowable. Thus, his 'idealism' is (in a sense) transcendental rather than absolute. Nevertheless, this is in part what has made Vico so attractive to diverse thinkers: his ability to think the historical in purely human terms, indeed, as necessarily a human creation, and a poetic one at that.

¹⁵ Cf. Berlin: 'This is the first formulation of the celebrated theory of alienation, *Entfremdung*, a cornerstone of Hegel's philosophy of history and of Marx's sociology, whereby men are for long ages governed by rigid beliefs, unseen divinities, laws and institution created, indeed, by men, but deriving their authority from the delusion that they are objective, timeless and unalterable like the laws of physical nature. Vico's notion of history makes use of this concept long before Feuerbach. Men fear death, and collectively invent gods stronger than death. They crave for laws, justice, the divine will, to maintain and protect their form of life, and so invent objective entities called laws, justice, the divine will, to maintain and protect their form of life. Rites that inspire terror are created, albeit unconsciously, to preserve the tribe against dangers and enemies, external and internal. Yet all this is man's own creation, and man can come to understand it, however imperfectly, because (though he is fulfilling a plan not of his but of God's devising) he alone made it. That is what makes history penetrable to him in the sense in which nature remains for ever opaque' (*TCE*: 82-83).

¹⁶ Compare Fisch: 'Vico shares with the Marxists and existentialists the negative view that there is no human essence to be found in individuals as such, and with the Marxists the positive view that the essence of humanity is the ensemble of social relations, or the developing system of institutions' (*NS*: J4).

However, Vico's Catholic orthodoxy and Scholastic education led him to present humanity's creative possibilities in a manner quite distinct from the Judeo-Christian God's.

[T]he first men of the gentile nations, children of nascent mankind, created things according to their own ideas. But this creation was infinitely different from that of God. *For God, in his purest intelligence, knows things, and, by knowing them, creates them; but they, in their robust ignorance, did it by virtue of a wholly corporeal imagination.* And because it was quite corporeal, they did it with marvellous sublimity; a sublimity such and so great that it excessively perturbed the very persons who by imagining did the creating, for which they were called 'poets,' which is Greek for 'creators'.

(NS: 376; emphasis added)

Brown, as we saw earlier, cites that last line in *Closing Time* (79), and on the following page he writes: 'Man makes himself by making his own gods, and this is poetry' (CT: 80).

With this in mind, a clear distinction has to be drawn between the Catholic Vico and the hermetic Brown. The latter wants to claim the former for his mystical tradition, and in some respects this may be plausible. The *New Science* does suggest a manner of reading the world in terms of its own 'closed' symbolic intensity, in the sense of co-belonging asserted by *Love's Body*. However, Vico clearly distinguishes between the type of knowledge such a reading might afford and that provided by God. People, he argues, create themselves and their worlds out of ignorance, out of a profound poverty of 'real' knowledge. But this poverty for Brown at least, is the *strength* of the early peoples (their 'romantic' naïveté). For in this type of knowledge nothing is given forever, and the relationship between people and nature can be more tightly drawn because of the dynamic potentiality of uncertainty rather than in spite of it. Brown cites the following passage from Vico twice in *Closing Time*: '*as rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them (HOMO INTELLIGENDO FIT OMNIA), this imaginative metaphysics shows that*

man becomes all things by not understanding them (HOMO NON INTELLIGENDO FIT OMNIA)' (CT: 9, 47; Brown's emphasis; NS, 405). I hear in this Brown's call for the release from both rationalist and Absolute idealist chains, chains which always reduce the potential of the 'known' by diminishing the creativity of the 'knower.' Although for Vico this is a religious point (the *sole* knower is God), and for Brown a mystical one (the knower is 'man'), the spirits of both are, dialectically, commensurate. Vico goes on: 'when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them.' (NS: 405) This process of becoming, of *nascimento*, may stem from ignorance and from the metaphors of poverty. However, as shall be shown in the next section, it is perhaps the most 'real' form of knowledge that humanity can attain; it certainly was, for Vico, the most 'factual.'

How, then, can the complexities of 'truth,' 'fact' and 'reality,' be initially approached from a Viconian perspective? It is helpful to look at how Vico asserts the relationship between philosophy and philology. Philosophy, he argues in the *New Science*, has usually shied away from language, because of its 'deplorable obscurity of causes and almost infinite variety of effects' (NS: 7). Indeed, it is only because Vico postulates a Providential hand in the ideal eternal history of civil society, that he is willing to make the attempt to examine it himself. Philosophy, he writes, 'contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes that of which human choice is the author, whence comes consciousness of the certain' (NS: 138). The more the first of these 'rise toward universals, the closer [it] approach[es] the truth', and complementarily, the more the second 'take[s] hold of particulars, the more certain [it] becomes[s]' (NS: 219). Now, there are two sets of distinctions here: firstly, that between the true and the certain

and, secondly, that between their corresponding modes of apprehension: knowledge and consciousness respectively. For the time being, it is only necessary to be clear that knowledge of the true (*verum*) belongs to knowledge of the natural world, and knowledge of the certain (*certum*), to linguistic or cultural knowledge. Knowledge of nature arises from the proposition of universals; that of culture (a term Vico does not use), from consciousness of particulars. The idea of the imaginative universal, or ‘poetic genera’ briefly alluded to above, does not contradict this, because an imaginative universal, Jove for example, is merely the metaphorical agglomeration of disparate particulars. It is only the *emotions* of the poetic character that give it definition as a ‘universal,’ and, like Kant’s reflecting judgment, it makes no grounding or conceptual claims. I do not want to make too much of the second distinction, between ‘knowledge’ and ‘consciousness,’ because it is not made explicit elsewhere. It is enough to suggest that knowledge corresponds to that which is alien, that is, in the first instance nature; whilst consciousness is of the products of peoples, their historical documents, the foremost among which is language, or rather, signification in general. It should be becoming clear, however, from the dynamic thus far outlined, that the processes of signification, that is of ‘inner’ consciousness understood as philology, will come to dominate scientific knowledge, or natural philosophy. But I shall leave further discussion of this particular point to the second section.

It is vital to Vico’s understanding of ‘philology,’ and to the philologist Brown’s appropriation of him, to show just what *logos* means. Indeed, it will bring much of what has been said and will be said into a sharper focus. In the following quote he is describing the use of *logos* from which he derives ‘logic’ in Poetic Logic. But once Vico has outlined the etymology of a term he tends to use it in that reclaimed sense and this is almost

certainly how the *logos* in ‘philology’ should be interpreted. The following is also a typical example of the range, obscurity and invention of Vico’s thought.

‘Logic’ comes from *logos*, whose first and proper meaning was *fabula*, carried over into Italian as *favella*, speech. In Greek the fable was also called *mythos*, whence comes the Latin *mutus*, mute. For speech was born in mute times as mental [or sign] language, which Strobe in a golden passage says existed before vocal or articulate [language]; whence *logos* means both word and idea.... Thus the first language in the first mute times of the nations must have begun with signs, whether gestures or physical objects, which had natural¹⁷ relations to the ideas [to be expressed]. For this reason *logos*, or word, meant also deed to the Hebrews and thing to the Greeks.... Similarly, *mythos* came to be defined for us as *vera narratio*, or true speech, the natural speech which Plato and then Iamblichus said had been spoken in the world at one time. But this speech in the *Cratylus* was therefore in vain, and he was criticized for it by Aristotle and Galen. For that first language, spoken by the theological poets, was not a language in accord with the nature of the things it dealt with (as must have been the sacred language invented by Adam, to whom God granted divine onomothesia, the giving of names to things according to the nature of each), but was fantastic speech making use of physical substances endowed with life and most of them imagined to be divine.

(NS: 401; translators’ interpolations)

Whole hosts of ideas are vying for attention in this dense passage. I merely want to highlight the constellation that surrounds the etymology of *logos*. Customarily, *logos* is given a meaning which either corresponds to speech, or to word, or abstractly, but significantly for the study of what has come to be known as logic, to reasoning; these meanings sometimes come together in ‘discourse’ or ‘account.’ Thus comes the ‘Listening not to me but to the *logos*...’¹⁸ of Heraclitus, and ‘In the beginning was the *logos*,’ of the Gospel of St. John. What is fascinating about Vico’s derivation is that he traces it

¹⁷ Which, or course, does not mean ‘given’—quite the reverse. That which is ‘natural’ is imposed and arbitrary.

¹⁸ See the recent translation by T. M. Robinson, Heraclitus, *Fragments* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 36-37. He translates *λόγος* as ‘account.’

through *fabula*, which corresponds on the one hand to the idea of speech (*favella*), but on the other to both myth and to silence (*mythos, mutus*), in direct opposition to *logos* as speech and reasoning. The *logos* is for Vico the original (metaphorical) meditation upon the world which *preceded* speech in terms of the development of human consciousness—it was both, as Brown put it, deed and thing. Moreover, it relates to Brown's reading of Hesiod's *Theogony* and the place of myth in his thought more generally. Myths, for Vico, are not fantastic tales in the usual sense, that is either tall stories or manipulative narratives. The myths and fables, like the words in which they are cast, are originally 'true.' That is, they belong to the truth of the relationship of the first peoples to their environments. Fantasies they might be, but like the tale of the origin of Jove in thunder, they *exhaust the possibilities of meaning* to those peoples of those times—and there can be few better definitions of what 'truth' means for such an idealism.

These fables are ideal truths suited to the merit of those of whom the vulgar tell them; and such falseness to fact as they contain consists simply in failure to give their subjects their due. So that, if we consider the matter well, *poetic truth is metaphysical truth*, and physical truth which is not in conformity with it should be considered false.

(NS: 205; emphasis added)

Myths are able to bring together the imaginative universals or poetic genera of ancient times and signify the unintelligible actions of the world. As the limits of meaning, these myths are, necessarily, the limit of the true. After Vico, the *logos*, like the true, is an historical variable. When the *logos* slips back into Poetic Logic, philology or, as shall be discussed later, etymology, it is necessary to bear in mind the relationship between it and the poetic modes of knowing and bringing to presence the natural world.

This corresponds to Vico's poetic metaphysics, which empties history of abstract rationality in favor of the plenum of poetry, the correspondence of word and idea. Now, in one sense, this appeals to the dominant understanding of logic in that it bears upon a direct, that is 'logical,' relation between a subject and an object, for example, the *vera narratio* of Plato.¹⁹ However, the 'natural' relation between word and thing does not come within the orbit of a poetic metaphysics. Plenitude cast in these terms belongs only to the Adamic language, not to that of fallen and scattered humanity. Here the *logos* corresponds to the imaginations or fabulations of the gentile—animist—peoples. As such, it has a purely *ideal* attachment to the things it describes. By ideal here I mean that the *logos* moves purely within the circuit of human construction. It is a hermeneutic circle—it is a kind of *logocentrism*, but one that does not have the essentialist entelechy, or realisation of presence, of much traditional metaphysics.

It is because the *logos* discerned by philology moves wholly within the circle of the human creativity, that is, it emerges solely as a product of the mind, that for Vico, the historian can take advantage of it. The philological determination of the poetry of ancient peoples discovers that the trace of humanly created history is not opaque to an imaginative reconstruction, and thus it brings the 'spirit' locked within its documents (*facta*) to the fore. For Vico, this is part of the eternal ideal movement of history: in the *logos* we are never strangers to ourselves. Therefore, in this quasi-idealist case, philology is able to contain philosophy, or at least draw it from a straight line into a circle. This is why the truths that lead to *Geisteswissenschaften* will always, for Vico, dominate those of *Naturwissenschaften*. Because of this Benedetto Croce, arguably Vico's most influential

¹⁹ Ironically, Vico, as most Scholars prior to the Hellenic revival in pre-Romantic Germany, for the most part knew the Greeks in Latin translation.

interpreter, suggests that ‘Poetry is produced not by the mere caprice or pleasure, but by natural necessity’ (*PGV*: 48). Thus, in *Closing Time*, Vico confirms through anticipation Brown’s, ‘There is only poetry.’ The corollary of this is that reflective or philosophical thought is unnatural, and indeed, as shall be shown in the next section, this is the precise outcome of Vico’s *New Science*.

II

It is when history turns reflective that ‘we take refuge in the Void, the Nothing’ (*CT*: 57). Reflexivity is, in Vico’s *New Science* the end, where the *corso* slips over into *ricorso*. This may take more or less time—it will certainly take a long time—but his ineluctable ‘ideal eternal history of nations’ demands the ebb and flow of the civilisations it purports to define. In my reading of Brown, via Vico, I want to draw explicit attention to the way that the stage of human development denominated ‘the barbarism of reflection’ (*NSL* 1106) in the *New Science* can be understood in *Closing Time* as ‘nihilism,’ or, better, as nihilism coming to understand itself. The first barbarism is pre-linguistic (etymologically problematic, perhaps). The second barbarism arises from the scepticism brought about by too much meaning (which Vico would probably define as ‘democracy’), the calling into question of accepted norms, scepticism, and most of all, the decline in piety. Vico’s understanding of this period is reactionary—very much part of the Counter-Reformation; Brown’s response is revolutionary, eschatological.

For Vico and for Brown humans are not, essentially, *Homo Sapiens*, wisdom comes too late, but *Homo Faber*, ‘man as maker’ (*CT*: 18). The *New Science* is the history of gentile civilisations making themselves; *Closing Time*, borrowing from *Finnegans Wake*,

is trying to put together the pieces that these civilisations have made after the return to barbarism: the barbarism of reflexivity. Brown's book is a revolutionary version of Eliot's shored-up fragments ('Time, gentlemen please?' [CT: ix]), equally paratactic, but refusing to settle upon old myths. On the contrary, like *Love's Body*, it is establishing new ones. There is a paradox here that we have seen before: all the fragments are old. But, maybe, that is to repeat the tired lie of reflexivity that in its essential linearity can only look backwards with distaste, or with nostalgia—which is merely distaste for the present. It would be more in the spirit of Brown's encounter with Vico and Joyce to see the fragments of the past as variables, not artefacts to be consigned to museums, classified and lost, but as 'facts of art' to be endlessly reinvented. In fact, for both Vico and Brown, this process is inevitable—though with markedly different consequences—and it is what distinguishes humanity from god, the finite from the infinite. God, everywhere at all times (*ius omni*), knows his world absolutely because he has made it absolutely; humans can never *know* anything but what they have *made*—and they never make anything entirely (except, ironically enough, God²⁰). This, extrapolating from Brown, is the origin of human freedom and it emerges most clearly from the conversion of the made and the true ('*verum*" et "*factum*"...*convertuntur*' [TCE: 35]).

As Vico asserts, in much quoted passage:

For the first indubitable principle posited above is that this world of nations has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modifications of our own human mind. *And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also narrates them.* Now, as geometry, when it constructs the world of quantity out of its elements, or contemplates that world, it is creating it for itself, just so does our Science [create for itself the world of nations], but with a reality greater by just so much as the institutions having to do with human affairs are more real than

²⁰ This, of course, depends on whether there is a distinction between the pagan Jove and the Judeo-Christian God—that is, how far you are to take Vico's proto-nihilism.

points, lines, surfaces, and figures are. And this very fact is an argument, O reader, that these proofs are of a kind divine and should give thee a divine pleasure, since in God knowledge and creation are one and the same thing.

(NS: 349; translators' interpolation)

Brown cites the italicised sentence in *Closing Time* (CT: 20), juxtaposing it with a paraphrase from his earlier version in *Love's Body*: 'Man Makes himself, even his own body./The human body in a historical variable' (CT: 21; LB: 127). These claims correspond to the romantic axiom suggested by the first section of this chapter that: 'to know is to know how to make it/(to have made it' (CT: 18). This is absolutely opposed to the then prevalent Cartesian doctrine of 'clear and distinct ideas,' which begins from first principles observed, *passively*, from nature (*primum verum*), and is usually reducible to the mathematical postulates that from Pythagorean times have been assumed to reside *in* nature. For Vico, as I have already pointed out, this type of knowledge belongs to God, for he alone has *made* the world. The condition of mathematical knowledge, analogously, is not to have *found* it, but to have *made* it. Brown quotes from Vico's *Autobiography*: '*In geometry we demonstrate because we create./The rule and criterion of truth is to have made it?*' (CT: 18). And Berlin echoes this: 'formal sciences, like mathematics and logic, are not forms of discovery at all but of invention' (TCE: 41). The truth claims that they can make do not correspond to 'nature' except as it is ordered by *active* human engagement, that is, by the human imagination.²¹ Rigor, the claim with which mathematics substantiates itself, arises not because it reflects an 'outer' reality, but because it belongs, in its entirety, to an 'inner' arbitrariness. Mathematics oversteps the limit of its legitimacy the moment it makes

²¹ This is another foreshadowing of a later philosophy, as here Vico's distinction between mathematics as discovered or invented is parallel to Kant's position in the first *Critique*, i.e., the distinction between analytic and synthetic *a priori* judgements. Mathematics, Kant argues, is the latter, it comes from our manner of intuiting 'space' not from space 'in itself' (*an sich*).

or tries to demonstrate a statement about nature, in physics for example, because nature is always absolutely other to it. Vico writes, ‘Demonstration is operation; truth is what has been made, and for this very reason we cannot demonstrate physics *a causis* [sic] because the elements which compose nature are outside us’ (*TCE*: 36). Mathematics moves entirely within the human hermeneutic, and as such it is perfectly ‘true’—but creative and not ‘real.’

As a consequence of this distinction between finding and making, the ‘facts’ that the historian uncovers in ancient documents are ‘almost diametrically opposed to that carried by the term “fact” in empirical contexts.’²² As A. Robert Caponigri observes, this is the type of fact that is made, that is an ‘artefact.’

Before the historical document conceived thus as its own ‘factum’, the human spirit cannot assume a posture of alienation. Rather the document so conceived elicits an act of recognition, of self-recognition, however rudimentary, on the part of spirit. Between spirit and the terms of products of its own historical creative activity there can be, not alienation, but only recognition and identity.

(*TI*: 149)

The idea of *factum* here outlined, enables historical truth, that is truth as identity in terms of human *activity*, to be established. And this only occurs because human activity is a making activity, a production of the imagination—it is *poiesis*—as was put forward in the last chapter. Also significant is that due to the identity or self-recognition of spirit, this truth, contrary to Hayden White, is non-alienating. ‘For the total presence of spirit which will be actual and genuine, and not illusory, will be the life actually traversed through the expressive moments represented in those documents’ (*TI*: 153). This type

²² A. Robert Caponigri, *Time and Idea: The Theory of History in Giambattista Vico* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp. 148. Hereafter referred to as *TI* in the text.

of knowledge is called *coscienza* (conscience, consciousness), that is the coming together (*coitus*) in consciousness of the known and the ‘knower,’ because they are both *made*.

In the complex collage of *Closing Time*, Brown announces the movement thus:

Man as maker

(*homo faber*)

science is of making

scire est per causas scire

knowledge is knowledge of causes

to know is to know how to make it

(to have made it)

v. Descartes clear and distinct ideas:

In geometry we demonstrate because we create.

The rule and criterion of truth is to have created it. *Autob.* 38

The true (*verum*) and the made (*factum*) are

convertible

Berlin, 165

verification is fabrication

fact is fabrication

homo faber

man is the forger; at his forge

forging the uncreated conscience of his race.

(*CT*: 18)

If mathematics is reduced to a circular epistemology *qua* its attempt to ground itself in the ‘world,’ then how are we to understand Brown’s phrase ‘knowledge is knowledge of causes’—for it certainly cannot reflect the pattern of cause and effect, that is, the statement of knowledge from first principles? Maybe the answer is already clear. It has emerged from the constant refrain of Vico’s work: that to know the truth of something is to have created it—that is, to have been its *cause*. This is purely an historically meaningful causality, one that is based in the free choices of humans, which is in turn based upon their creative essence as *posse finitum*. It is a *motivated* rather than a ‘blind’ or ‘billiard ball’ understanding of determinate causality. The causes might not always produce the effects intended, but that is not the point—which is that human agency was involved in

the process of change from one state of affairs to another and that the trace of the engagement is inherited as ‘causality.’

Perhaps, in the end, the most forceful case for the separation of mathematical and poetic knowledge is a reprise of that given by Castoriadis in the last chapter: mathematics yields no ontological weight. This is the conclusion drawn by Caponigri.

[The] poetic character...is an ontological structure...but the synthetic transaction of [mathematical] sciences generates an alien world because it effects no ontological result. The world which is generated in history is real because it is the being of the human spirit itself that informs that world.

(*TI*: 176-177)

This is anticipated by Benedetto Croce, who writes: ‘The physical sciences of to-day is in fact like a house, sumptuously furnished by former owners, to which their heirs have added nothing, but have occupied themselves merely in moving and rearranging the furniture’ (*PGV*: 13). Croce also makes clear one of the great ironies of mathematics: the fact that it was designed to understand the workings of God by mimicking his creative process—from first principles—but that in doing so it ineluctably alienates itself from that very world. Moreover, only in this way can it retain its power; indeed, it is its greatest strength.

For Vico, reading a peculiar Platonic ideality into his theology, God is the plentitudinous birth of ‘being’ out of itself, or, as he put it in his biography, quoted by Brown: ‘*the metaphysics of Plato leads to a metaphysical principle, which is the eternal idea, drawing out and creating matter from itself, like a seminal spirit that forms its own egg*’ (*Autob.* 121, *CT*: 27; Vico’s emphasis). It is interesting here to compare what Castoriadis said about God, the Demiurge, in the last chapter. For Castoriadis, Plato’s God, who is also Vico’s, was the fabricator *par excellence*, but not because he ‘gave birth to his own idea’ but because he merely

copied the world of appearance from the model of the universal forms. He was the ‘fabricator’ of the cosmos but not its first cause, in much the same way as mathematical models can describe nature, but must remain outside of it. The irony here is that, following this logic, mathematics is necessarily reduced to the status that Plato gave to art—a mere copy at two removes from the reality of being. A second irony is that the bestowal of the distinction of being ‘first cause’ upon God goes in fact to Aristotle, of whom Vico says: *‘the metaphysics of Aristotle leads to a physical principle, which is matter, from which the particular forms are drawn; and indeed makes God a potter who works at things outside of himself’* (*Autob.* 121, *CT*: 27; Vico’s emphasis). It seems that Vico wants it both ways. To retain the ideality of the forms ‘delivered’ to the cosmos via the *chora* (the nursemaid of all becoming), but also to find God in all the stages of the process (*ius omni*)—as mother, father, nursemaid and offspring. For Plato, as Castoriadis’s point implies, the world of appearance (becoming) is necessarily discrete from the world of the forms (being). But in Vico’s metaphysics this distinction is somehow sublated: for him the being of objects, institutions, etc., is their coming to presence in the process of the Providential becoming of human history—that is where the cosmos is most real. This, I would argue, amounts to a creative misreading of Plato by Vico—a strategic anthropomorphism of the Demiurge that is, perhaps, in keeping with the Catholic orthodoxy that exists in his work. He projects onto his God an exaggerated version of the very ‘least’ power that resides in humanity—the ideal creation of their institutions and through them the creation of their environment. God’s environment, however, is everything, and pantheism—if not animism—is the most likely corollary (*ius omni*). But for Brown, recalling *Love’s Body*, the *Timaeus* is reread to assert the creative authority of the ‘son-sun-hero in the mother-dragon night’ (*LB*: 50), and to parody the gendered platonic metaphor of illumination.

In Brown's words: 'It is all a misunderstanding, a creative misunderstanding/the fortunate fall' (*CT*: 47). The misunderstood is the necessary consequence of an imaginary or poetic relation to the world, a hermeneutic circle into which *Homo Faber* have fallen. So, when humans 'bring' what is 'out there' to presence via the faculty of active imagination they necessarily miss 'it' entirely—and, in the case of God, such logic leads to an inevitable abyss. This is the 'misunderstanding' attendant upon all idealism, upon all finite beings.

As a brief aside, the assertion of the essential status of humans as *Homo Faber*, as makers of themselves, is, arguably, one of the crucial moments in philosophical humanism, but one that leads *away* from humanist values, or at least toward the incredibility of those values, and finally into a reflexive nihilism. By reflexive nihilism, I mean the position the thinker arrives at when he or she has learnt two of the lessons from Nietzsche. Firstly, to have concluded that value forms are themselves constructed, not constitutive, and thus that these value forms were in themselves 'nihilistic' because they assumed values where there were none ('the world is a veil we spin to hide the void' [*LB*: 261]); and, moreover, in doing so these 'values' denied the will or authorship of the human being. Secondly, the assertion of that will in overcoming values: 'The destruction of what never existed' (*LB*: 261). The movement laid out by the trajectory of Brown's work from *Life Against Death* through *Love's Body* and into *Closing Time*, which strives to reveal that 'Man makes himself, even his own body', and that, 'The human body is a historical variable' (*CT*: 21; cf. *LB*: 127). Thus, the gigantic distension of the imagination—which for Castoriadis is the evolutionary origin of humanity—comes to the fore during the 'barbarism of reflection.' It tips over, firstly, into romantic idealism, the first philosophy to make a coherent claim for imaginative ontogenetic power; and from which point, Kant's teeter-

ing on the brink of the abyss, romantic nihilism is one of the next possible steps: Schopenhauer to Nietzsche. And I would argue that Marcuse and Brown are suspended between these two poles. Marcuse remains an (Hegelian) idealist (even within his materialist position), Brown shifts much further towards nihilism, though as Nietzsche recognised, a movement all the way there is, probably, impossible. Vico's philosophy, which anticipated so much romantic and idealist philosophy, is usually recognised as being the first to establish that the provenance and authority of human history belonged to humans themselves, to *Homo Faber*. Thus, within it the origins of modern nihilism may be found, that is, the crisis of the ungrounded 'self.'

'Human being,' then, for Vico is an historical product. This, as Berlin makes clear 'was a stroke of genius' (*TCE*: 57) which ran counter to the vast majority of established Scholastic, theological and nascent rationalistic thought. Indeed, the entire 'central Western tradition [for which] the existence of an unaltering human nature whose properties are knowable a priori' (*TCE*: 59) was a given. It is also an anticipation of the break from 'order' that Berlin diagnoses as the real romantic revolution. In the *New Science* rather, it is the *facta* of human history, its linguistic artefacts, which provide the necessary support for an analysis of this shifting 'flux' of historical becoming. Language, the *logos*, in the sense outlined in the last section, is the trace structure of the evolution of the relationship between people and environment, subject and object. The question Vico asks, then, is philological and etymological: 'What kinds of words have human beings used to express their relation to the world, to each other, and to their own past selves' (*TCE*: 63). The answer to this question will correspond to the hermeneutic of 'spirit' which circulates as the *logos*. In this idealist interpretation of Vico, it is necessary again to follow the often Hegelian path of Caponigri's work, for he brings to life most powerfully

the sense of this movement in the *New Science*. Also, he unwittingly establishes a grounding in ‘presence’ that is vulnerable to and opens a space for nihilism that is necessary for an adequate understanding of *Closing Time* as a romantic text.

Caponigri, for whom the definition of the human as *posse finitum* is key, takes off from the transcendent essence of finitude moving into ‘otherness’ which begins the dynamic of subjective history, the dialectic of which is familiar from Hegel (but without plunging into the absolute, rather retaining an unknowable noumenal underbelly). The Viconian slant is to couch the whole argument in terms of the significative data that makes up humanity’s inheritance and legacy. This is the movement of the subject out of itself that I began to discuss in the last chapter in terms of the imagination’s temporal intention: the creation of the new. In Vico’s work it is possible to suggest an analogous movement *backwards* in time, to discover the trace of the new, that is, the creative moments of the human spirit, in the *facta* of the old, and thus to trace a poetics of history. For Caponigri such an historical process would be the emergence of an ideal totality (a point upon which, however, I am not so sure). He writes:

Man is essentially and constitutively a finite principle which strives toward the infinite: *finitum quod tendit ad infinitum*; the distention [*sic.*] of his being between the terms of this ‘tendency’ is the very substance of time and temporal process. At the same time, this whole movement of the human subject is ideal, for it is a movement in terms of presence. The movement of the human subject is toward the totality of its own presence to itself, toward its own idea; it strives to become itself, to realize in its own actuality the ultimate ideal implications of its open or ‘indefinite’ nature. This is essentially the meaning of that ‘humanity’ which forms the object of Vico’s ‘New Science’: the idea, or presence of itself to itself, toward which the human subject moves in history.

(*TI*: 144-145)

This openness and indefinite finitude is the reason why ‘In history man makes himself’ (*CT*: 21), each time, over again, from the beginning. But the detail that Caponigri gives

to this yields a depth that is, perhaps, not immediately apparent in Brown's interpretation—though the implications are similar. The movement of the finite toward the infinite is the necessary paradox of the Viconian subject, because in order to strive toward infinity the subject must overcome the otherness of objects in the environment and in time (in Hegel's terms, the sublation of *an sich* into *für sich*). This can be attempted in two ways: outer or inner knowledge. The first of these, scientific epistemology, constitutes the truth as *verum* and leads to 'self-alienation of spirit' as no ideal presence is attained. Inner knowledge, however, is the movement of the spirit amongst its own *facta*, and is entirely appropriate because "The human spirit, as *posse finitum*, is wholly, in its actuality, the actuality of the production of the "facta" of history' (*TI*: 149). Thus, the turning of empty *verum* into *factum*, through the epistemology of poetic logic provides, Caponigri argues, immanent self-presence in the subject standing over against its own objects. This is the poetic plenum of history, and belongs to the outcome of that statement that is so important for Brown that he quotes from it on his first page, and which I quoted from in part earlier.

[M]an in his ignorance makes himself the rule of the universe, for...he has made of himself an entire world. So that, as rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them (*homo intelligendo fit omnia*), this imaginative metaphysics shows that man becomes all things by *not* understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*); and perhaps the latter proposition is truer than the former, for when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them.

(*NS*: 405)

If for Vico's 'ignorance' we read, with Caponigri, 'finitude' we have here the ideality of plenitude brought to self-presence in the *logos* outlined in the foregoing. And it can be concluded as before, that the weakness of humanity, the poverty of its relationship to

the ‘external’ world, which brings about the necessity of a poetic response, is its strength and the ceaseless dynamic of its growth. It is, also, of course, nihilistic and corresponds to the naïveté of romanticism. ‘There is only poetry.’

What is established here is a complete circularity of meaning, the only touchstone of which is the human body as the origin of metaphor, but which, in turn is only ‘understood’ as corporeal affect—pure sensuality. The otherness of the world, the necessary objects that give shape to human finitude are completely absorbed into the ‘hermeneutic,’ and their alterity is subsumed by the omnivorous ideality of the romantic imagination. This process is, in effect, the same as that which was found in Kant’s first and third *Critiques*. There the understanding sought to find itself in the uniform rules of nature (which is the definition of aesthetic pleasure), but was actually already the faculty by which nature was given its rules (though I did not uphold this reading). The understanding is here a product of pure narcissism—as is Caponigri’s self-movement into presence. Perhaps these conclusions yield a tentative definition of romantic philosophy, where *corso* and *ricorso*, *arche* and *telos* are one and the same in the (re)circulation or hermeneutic of narcissistic imagination.

That this is a symbolic or linguistic process only adds to the nihilistic potential of Caponigri’s idealist reading of Vico. ‘The life of spirit’, he writes ‘is essentially an expressive and symbolic process. Its products, its ‘facta’, consequently, are not *things* but *words*, interior words by which spirit expresses and gives form to its own being’ (*TI*: 150). An ontological movement where ‘Spirit is wholly presence’ (*TI*: 150), but where presence is consciousness finding its own activity in the symbols—or *logoi*—that are the products of human interaction with ‘nature.’ There is nothing ‘present’ in this presence;

it is purely the circulation of signifying matter, which is no matter at all, but only spirit.

Thus:

This open or indeterminate presence, the indefinite nature of man, in Vico's words, is not to be thought of as in any way actual or pre-existent with reference to the concrete process of the life of finite spirit; it is wholly immanent to that concrete process and, in itself, without form. Under this aspect, it bears the character of absence rather than of presence, but absence that is pregnant with presence. Of this indeterminate presence, so near to absence, are generated the forms of concrete presence. Prior to the formation of the concrete modes of presence, finite spirit *is* not; it achieves its being and its existence only in those concrete forms.

(*TI*: 150-151)

And the forms that bring out the potential being of *posse finitum* are symbols: language as the very process of thought. The *word* is the place *where subject and object come together as ideal presence* (not empirical substance) where before there was, in these terms, only absence, a lack of spirit, of mind, of consciousness: of imaginative poetry and of *poiesis* as an ontogenetic faculty. Within this interchangeability of *logos* and *poiesis* there is a presence which is, empirically, nothing (but, for Vico, quite clearly empiricism would be even less without it). It is a void or a nothing in which there is no 'otherness' (which is what constitutes the void as inexhaustible futurity for Castoriadis), but a static hall of mirrors. The subject is literally *mise en abyme*, which is mistaken by Caponigri for plentitude. As such, I would argue, Caponigri's reading of Vico, fecund as it is, eventually falls into this abyss, which just because its depths cannot be adequately plumbed, is mistaken for everything. This constitutes the very worst of the 'barbarism of reflection': the objectification of the ideal. Caponigri's Vico is no precursor of romanticism, but rather an heir to absolute idealism. So, as fascinating but moribund, his interpretation of Vico remains too self-sufficient. It does not adequately problematise the narcissism of its

own process, leaving self and idea untouched, and as such it forms, ironically enough, an unselfconscious nihilism.

This nihilism belongs to the last of Vico's historical phases, the barbarism of reflection. Perhaps more than a little implausibly Vico considers this stage to be the beginning of 'untruth' or 'irony' which would have begun to be disclosed by the syllogistic method:

Irony certainly could not have begun until the period of reflection, because it is fashioned by falsehood by dint of a reflection which wears the mask of truth. Here emerges a great principle of human institutions, confirming the origin of poetry disclosed in this work: that since the first men of the gentile world had the simplicity of children, who are truthful by nature, the first fables could not feign anything false; they must therefore have been, as they have been defined above, true narrations.

(NS: 408)

The conceit that children are 'truthful by nature' has long since passed away—if it was ever widely held. Nevertheless, what this approaches is the assertion that because primitive peoples were operating at their limits of signification, due to the poverty of language, they had little option but to tell the 'truth' *qua* their imaginative response to their environment. The ability to reflect upon language itself 'wearing the mask of truth' was not an option for them, as language was too much a part of the poetic hermeneutic. The subsequent prosaic hermeneutic, however, is misleading by 'nature.' What has occurred to bring about this decline is the possession of language by the vulgar majority. 'This language [of the plebeians] must be understood as having sprung up by their free consent, by this eternal property, that vulgar speech and writing are a right of the people' (NS: 433). The invention of the alphabet is key here. Hitherto symbols had been mute, gestural or had evolved into hieroglyphics. They were concrete and particular with a limited ability to express the abstract. The alphabet, however, immediately made a re-

flexive fragmentation of poetic universals not only possible, but also historically necessary. Thus, the alphabet and the *possibility* of democracy arise simultaneously. Vico does not explain the principle behind this, but perhaps it is the way that alphabetically written language is a composite, that is, within its history and development different meanings can ‘come to be’ in one word, allowing a reflection upon language that was, up to this point, untenable. Peoples can now make *reflective choices* about meanings, they can observe changes within their own languages—that is they are able to argue about truth and untruth, which is essentially, the origin of the democratic paradigm—even if democracy is absent. This perhaps rather fanciful reading of Vico does appeal to my tentative definition of democracy from a Viconian point of view, put forward in the first section. That it corresponds to a period of ‘too much meaning,’ and as a consequence of which, meaning has to be negotiated and scepticism is inevitable.

I want to suggest, in conclusion to this section, that irony, in Vico’s sense, leads to nihilism. A difficulty is presented by the two ways of looking at irony. On the one hand there is that approach taken by scientists and by Marxists, amongst others, that a distance from exaggerated figurative language enables a method to be developed which exposes lies and errors and approaches or makes claims about the truth—and this doubtless has brought with it many great benefits. On the other hand there is the nihilistic approach to this ironic knowledge acknowledged in the modern period firstly by Jacobi, the critic of Kant, through Schlegel and the Jena romantics, taken up in a different form by Max Stirner and reaching its peak with Nietzsche, that there is no truth, only metaphor (there is only poetry), and that science is nothing but the forgetting, deliberate or otherwise, of this essential nothingness (the refuge in the Void). Vico himself takes refuge in Providence and the cyclical. For him it is inevitable that decadent scepti-

cism either will fall back into barbarism, or will be subsumed within a more vigorous poetic or heroic culture at an earlier stage of development—this is his *corso* and *ricorso*. The real question for my reading of Brown, though, is how he puts the possibilities of this nihilism to work, how he uses it as a source of creativity that takes us out of the ‘refuge of the void, the Nothing.’ That is the recognition that the ideality of presence, the emergence of the world and the self from an imagination in which everything can be otherwise, and which I have already appealed to as the origin of freedom, is the purest potential of this period of history.

III

Brown’s book is an exemplary exercise in the mythography of poetic logic. Displaying a complete aversion to methodological arguments, syllogistic, soritic (accretive), or otherwise, and to theses in general, *Closing Time* is constructed around verbal plays, suggestive juxtapositions and collages supported by a kind of manic—Dionysiac—erudition. It is a book that does not need verification to feel vindicated. *Closing Time* begins as follows, and this quotation gives as fair a statement of Brown’s ‘methodology’ as will be found between its covers:

Time, gentlemen please?
 The question is addressed to Giambattista Vico and
 James Joyce.
 Vico, *New Science*; with Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*.
 ‘Two books get on top of each other and become
 sexual’
 John Cage told me that this is geometrically im-
 possible.
 But let us try it.

The book of Doublends Jined.

FW, 20

At least we can try to stuff *Finnegans Wake* into
Vico's *New Science*.

One world burrowing on another.

FW, 275

To make a farce.

(*CT*: ix)

'Two books get on top of each other and become sexual' (remembering *coscienza* and *coitus*) is first of all an attempt to gain progeny from the hermeneutic deferral of the book that was asserted in the last chapter—it develops the idea of an unrestricted economy of creativity that is at the heart of romanticism. It is also continuous with *Love's Body*, where:

Intercourse is what goes on in the sentence. In every sentence the little word 'is' is the copula, the penis or bridge; in every sentence magically, with a word, making the two one flesh. The little word 'is' is the hallmark of Eros, even as, Freud said, the little word 'no' is the hallmark of Death. Every sentence is dialectics, an act of love.

(*LB*: 252)

By bringing two *books* together Brown wants the reader to enter the orgy of words, multiplied dramatically from the promiscuity of the single sentence, to create a Bacchanalian whirl: 'cosmos upsung from chaos' (*CT*: 82); 'the Dionysian origin of civilization' (*CT*: 47). But the phallic 'is' only has its copulative power in poetry—the 'original' co-belonging—because the ontological work of the 'is' is negated in the 'propositional' grammar of reflective discourse, in which the 'is' is a mode of circulating knowledge, separate from the *idea*, and from the spirit. It does not let things be, which, as we saw with Marcuse in Chapter 3, was the purview of Kant's reflecting judgment. In mathematics, to say what something 'is' through propositions is to alienate that very thing from your discourse. This is why Vico's notion of originary *poiesis* is vital for Brown, and why the working out of this poetic logic in *Finnegans Wake* is for him the recreation

of the sublimity of the earliest poets. It is also what he called for in *Love's Body*, to 'Get the nothingness back into words. The aim is words with nothing to them; words that point beyond themselves rather than to themselves; transparencies, empty words. Empty words, corresponding to the void in things' (LB: 259). *Finnegans Wake* is exemplary here, in that it discounts the 'is' altogether and brings together 'word' and 'thing' in such a way that one cannot really be said to 'represent' the other, as in standard 'ironic' discourse, but where the word actually substitutes itself for the entire relation—takes the place of the created event.

'Really it is not I who am writing the crazy
book. It is you, and you, and that man over
there, and that girl at the next table.'

His producers are they not his consumers?

FW, 497

(CT: 109)

This is what makes Joyce's book so difficult for the modern 'prose' reader, who is used to a recognisable 'distance' between word and thing (even if misrecognised), and cannot easily or willingly fall back into the type of *logos* that strives to create its world as it goes along, to bring the reader, through their resistances, into the 'book.'

This is why the reading of Joyce given in *Closing Time* is also a recollection of an hermetic tradition that reads the world as an open book, where 'things' are words: 'It is all one book/The book of God's works and the Book of God's Word. Every phenomenon is scripture not alphabetic but hieroglyphic..../Every thing is legend: to be ready (*lego, legere*, to read)/to be deciphered' (CT: 90).²³ And in this Brown follows Vico's 'animistic' principle that 'Man makes himself by making his own Gods, and this is poetry' (CT: 80). When god is in everything (*ius omni*) it is because 'man' is in everything,

²³ Cf. John Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 3-20 and *passim*.

and the scripture to be read is that of the human imagination in all its ideality as it ‘becomes’ animate nature. Thus, recalling *Love’s Body*: ‘It is as scripture that man become part of nature again; he becomes mythy again, that is to say, mute’ (CT: 105). And this becoming (*nascimento*) is *Finnegans Wake*. In the hermeneutics of *Homo Faber* the ‘word’ of god becomes an absence as it transubstantiates itself into the circulating ‘presence’ of the *logos* of the human imagination. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was Man’ (CT: 88). *Logos* is *mythos* is *fabula*—is mute, and through the silent interpretation of the world, and later as speech, the Viconian *logos* sublates the scholastic and rationalist dualisms that begin with the syllogism, with representational thinking, with the ironic separation of truth and error, spirit and body, literal and metaphorical, and their final deflation into nihilism. Myth is truth at the limit of its meaning, neither the errors nor the conceits of the ancients, but *vera narratio*.

Dethroning philosophy in favour of mythology:

*It follows that the first science to be learned
should be mythology or the interpretation of fables.*

NS, 51

Truth and life is in myth:

*Poetic truth is metaphysical truth, and physical
truth which is not in conformity with it should be
considered false.*

NS, 205

(CT: 81)

The rebirth of myth—or the recognition that it has never gone away—allows for the revivification of language as *poiesis*. The barbarism of reflection turned over (*‘its just, its just about to, its just about to rolymholyover?’* [CT: 36; FW: 597]) into a releasement toward the evocation of language and a mystical revolution. It is an eschatological renaissance.

His method is *mythhood*, to make an unpardonable Joycean pun. Brown wants to remember that language was always already mythical (we must remember that this is the translator of the *Theogony* where myth stood in for philosophy, was prior to it), and thus

rather than a turn to the past, he affirms a mystical sublation into the future—a return of an animism (a return of the Gods) that has never been left behind (*‘Array! Surrection!’* [CT: 36; FW: 215]). This is the sublime task that Vico found in poetry: the task of giving life to inanimate objects, which exist as myth, as silence, as *logos*. And the task of the poetic for Brown is to give back to language the creative role that it has lost but never given up entirely. But in this, I am reiterating the romantic paradox, now resolved, that I outlined at the end of the first section between the old and the new. Neither *Finnegans Wake* nor *Closing Time* can leave the established language altogether, for they would be *completely* unintelligible, but must manipulate the workings of language from within the Viconian paradigm of the barbarism of reflection, working *through* irony to poetry: *ricorso*. This is, I shall argue, to begin to pass through nihilism, to bring it to face itself and to turn the crisis of its empty reflection into its empowerment.

The first stage of this revivification of language is to rediscover etymology. ‘The etymology of the word etymology: *etym* means true’ (CT: 83). So etymology is a composite of the words, *etym*: true (*ἔτυμος*—Greek: true, actual, most basic), and the word *logos*: myth or mute, speech, account, discourse, etc. The complexity of origins: is ‘etymology’—true account, true myth, basic silence, actual deed, etc.? (‘The antinomy between mind and body, word and deed, speech and silence overcome. Everything is metaphor; there is only poetry’ [LB: 266].) On the one hand, this indefinite nature of the etymology of etymology is just the type of paradox that the barbarism of reflection throws up and which, from a conservative perspective (Vico’s) could seem disastrous. In the *New Science*, the movement of etymology is from more meaning to less meaning, to recover the original, if necessarily ideal, plenitude in the birth of a word. On the other hand, Brown follows Joyce in moving in the opposite direction, to find such a surfeit of mean-

ing that only *creative* choices can be made. He takes fragmentation from its romantic origin through the tortured aphorisms of *Love's Body*, down to the very word. His task, then, is to split the etym and reveal its excess.

Etymology is *ricorso*: as it was in the beginning.

As in *Finnegans Wake*:

the abnihilisation of the etym.

FW, 353

That's what *Finnegans Wake* is about:

smashing the atom.

Etymys are atoms

Annihilisation of language:

he would wipe alley english spooker, multaphoniaksically spuking, of the face of the erse.

FW, 178

Annihilisation of language so that it can be abnihilated again; created out of nothing.

Out of the thunder

(CT: 88)

In the beginning was the *logos* and it was silent—mute. The *ricorso* returns to, or rather brings around again, the 'silence' of origins in *Finnegans Wake*: 'Mute speech/*science of sonorous silence* (FW, 230)/*all's set for restart after the silence* (FW, 382)/*the shocking silence* (FW, 393)/*The silence speaks the scene* (FW, 13)' (CT: 96). The same silence in John Cage? The silence that hears the call of the origin that is immanent in every imaginative moment. The same silence that Heidegger listens for in *die Sage*, the saying, which gives to poetry its weight as making.²⁴ Annihilisation and abnihilisation, *corso* and *ricorso*. To take language into the 'nothing' and to bring it back, out of the thunder, like the first people finding God in their own fear. Is this more Eliot than Joyce? 'What the Thunder Said': Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.²⁵ But Joyce's hundred letter rumbles in *Finnegans Wake* can also be heard: 'Ullbodturdenweirmudgaardgringnirurdrmolnirfenrirluk.kilokbaugumanodrrerinsu-

²⁴ See for example Martin Heidegger, 'The Way to Language,' in David Farrel Krell ed. *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 408-412.

²⁵ T. S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland,' *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 78-79.

rtkrinmgernrackinarockar! Thor's for you!—the hundredlettered name again, last word of perfect language (CT: 95; FW: 424). To 'abnihilate,' to pass through nihilism, however, is a difficult task—but it is made easier if you are relieved of the scepticism of modernism by an un-ironic—un-Eliotlike—use of myth. For, in Eliot myth is used to overcome the collapse into anomie of modernity. In Brown, myth is the affirmation of the collapse as the condition (speaking together) for the possibility of myth itself—circles not lines.

The *corso* and *ricorso*, the dialectic of meaning, which emerged from the necessary evolution of humanity to comprehend nature through *logos* and *mythos*, has been the dynamic, the narrative since the very beginning of thinking—indeed, the silent *logos* was the first thought. A page in *Closing Time* reads as follows:

Waiting for the return of the gods witnessing the return of barbarism The new barbarians <i>returning to primitive simplicity of the first world of peoples</i>	NS, 1106
to recognize the gods to greet them <i>Dei dialectus soloecismus</i> —the dialect of God is solecism	<i>Love's Body</i> , 239
God does not speak good English Not atticism but solecism Barbarism	
Barbarism, or speaking with tongues as in <i>Finnegans Wake</i> polyglot turning into glossolalia Pentecost <i>wordloosed over seven seas crowdblast in cel[t]el- leneteutoslawzendlatinsoundsript.</i>	FW, 219
<i>In the buginning is the woid, in the muddle is the sounddance.</i> Instead of the sentence the sounddance.	FW, 378

(CT: 63)

In this passage are contained all the difficulties and the beauties of working with Brown's little book. The complex and often overdetermined mixture of collage, quotation, ventriloquism, embroidery, suggestion, lyricism, which is part philosophy, part philology, religion, nihilism, linguistics, and hermetic mysticism. *Closing Time*, speaking with tongues—other peoples tongues: Joyce and Vico. And to disclose the movement of Brown's work on this page I need to set it within the debate thus far: *ricorso*.

To await the return of the gods but to witness the return of barbarism, this is the human condition in the 'ironic' period. But announced by Nietzsche in the death of God (from a disease diagnosed by Vico as irony) was the hope of the return of 'God' in the shape of 'humanity's' future—*Übermenschen*. But instead, barbarism. How, then, to recognise the Gods, to greet them—what language will they speak? The answer, I would argue, is the language that is *already* being spoken by the 'new barbarians' and forging their world. The task Brown sets himself is to 'find' god in extant human creativity—*facta*—where it has been, hitherto, imagined otherwise. Thus the recognition of god in *Homo Faber*, which can be seen as the first stage of nihilism—the loss of control, the crisis of grounds—needs to catch a glimpse of itself in the reflection of the imagination and thus return to itself its own poetic power. As Keiji Nishitani puts it: 'to deny oneself the ground of the being of the self given by history and voluntarily to demolish the ground which has become false, turning the being of the self into a question mark.'²⁶ And to rise up from this crisis to find in questioning deification not reification.

However, this God, like Joyce, does not speak good English. The dialect of God, of the imagination, is solecism—erroneous speaking, the necessary fragmentation

²⁶ Keiji Nishitani (trans. Graham Parkes and Setsuko Aihara), *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) p. 7.

of grammar that attends a dynamic language. Not Greek atticism but solecism; which as Brown the classicist would well know derives from Soloi, an Athenian colony where they spoke bad Greek, and thus were ‘barbarians’—etymology: βαρβαρο-oi: non-Greek speakers. Solecism is Barbarism. Barbarism, or speaking with tongues and in tongues, mystical babble—Gk. *glossolalia*, ‘tongue babble,’ or Babel, the antediluvian language of *Finnegans Wake*. It builds a tower to heaven by merely digging its foundations, its etymologies—it is where we already are—and *this* is Brown’s eschatology. His Pentecost is the descending of the Holy Spirit to the imaginative *Geist*, the overturning of that hierarchy to remind people once again that it is they who make the Gods from their own minds: the externalisation of the spirit.

The Babylonian confusion of tongues redeemed in the Pentecostal fusion. Many meanings swelling together in unity; because it is the unspoken meaning that they mean. Real unification is the unseen unity, unity at the unconscious level, at the level of symbolism.

(LB: 253)

And from this co-belonging at the core of symbolism the word is loosed world wide, to emerge again in the Celts, Hellenes, Teutons, Slavs, and in *latinsoundsript*. Each language is the work of a *spirit*, the essence of which is the ideality of imaginative presence, carving out of the *void* (in the beginning was the...; We take refuge in the...); and the logos is the nothing, and genesis emerges from the ‘*nixnixundnix*’ (CT: 56; FW: 415; *nichts-nichtsundnichts*), at the expense of the sentence, the solecistic *sounddance*.

Is there a thesis here? Is there an analysis that works a problem through to its end or to its beginning? Does Brown answer the questions he sets himself? Clearly not: he has no interest in ‘closure’ only in suspense, in—and he cites Ezra Pound—‘Confusion, the source of all renewal’ (CT: ix). As Berlin points out, Brown and Joyce

are ‘irrationalists’, they push the *New Science* ‘to its logical conclusion, [which] would destroy, at least in principle, all distinction between history as a rational discipline and mythical thinking’ (*TCE*: 136). This is anathema to Berlin, who seeks above all to trace patterns in history. It is also anathema to the vast majority of Viconians who yearn to bring Vico back in from the cold and establish his place in the philosophic canon between Descartes and Kant. Berlin refuses to take Vico to his limits—perhaps wisely so. But there is equal interest in the work of Brown, Joyce and, occasionally, Caponigri who take Vico into speculative regions where he would probably rather not have gone.

In many places Brown flattens Vico out and actually uses him against himself. Even though the foregoing analysis of the page from *Closing Time* almost reads like the *New Science* in its mixture of linguistic archaeology and imaginative fancy, it is directly opposed to what Vico wants to find in etymology, in philology and in origins. In the *New Science*, he writes:

that languages are more beautiful in proportion as they are richer in these condensed heroic [i.e., poetic] expressions; that they are more beautiful because they are more expressive; and that because they are more expressive they are truer and more faithful. And that on the contrary, in proportion as they are more crowded with words of unknown origin, they are less delightful, because obscure and confused, and therefore more likely to deceive and lead astray. The latter must be the case with languages formed by the mixture of many barbarous tongues, the history of whose original and metaphorical meanings had not come down to us.

(*NS*: 445; my interpolation)

There is a purity of origins here that is not to be found in Joyce or in Brown. For Vico language becomes corrupted the more ‘tongues’ it takes on board and it becomes further removed from its original or natural ‘connection’ to the thing (as event), the more adulterated it is by unknown words. If this is the case *Finnegans Wake* is the least delightful, the most corrupt and deceitful book that ever was written. For in *Finnegans Wake*, every

origin is lost and written over—indeed, the history of European languages is the palimpsest upon which the book is inscribed, and one of its arguments might be that there are no ‘origins.’

But is the necessary corollary of this that *Finnegans Wake* and by extension, *Closing Time*, are corrupt books? As I said above, it would be more in the spirit of Brown’s encounter with Vico and Joyce to see the fragments of the past as variables, not artefacts to be consigned to museums, classified and lost to history, but as facts (*facta*) of art to be endlessly reinvented. His archaeology is not driven by the desire for ‘plenitude’, but by the will to make the ‘origin’ exist in every moment; to take the *arche* from the past and to replace it in the present and as the very ‘cause’ of presence. Moreover, this presence does not fall from Heaven or come from the past, but emerges from pure sensuality and the consequent poverty of the transcendental imagination.

But it must be added that this is not a moment for an ‘elite few’—for poets in the traditional sense, but, on the contrary: ‘The language belongs to the people/and the poetry is in the language’ (*CT*: 107). Vico’s poetry belongs to the ‘vulgar’—his own prejudice—but this can work against Vico, and Brown thinks that he finds in the poetic logic of the *New Science* ‘a way to transcend Vico’s occultist elitism’ (*CT*: 107). However, what Brown in fact finds in Vico is a way of overcoming *his own* occult elitism and returning the mysteries to the people. In *Closing Time*, Brown seeks ultimately to ‘democratise’ language—that is, to return it to the common ownership of the people whence it came. It is necessary here to recall how different Brown’s tone was in his Phi Beta Kappa address of the early 1960s that I considered in the last chapter:

The alphabet is indeed a democratic triumph; and the enigmatic ideogram, as Ezra Pound has taught us, is a piece of mystery, a piece of poetry, not yet profaned. And so there comes a time—I believe we are in such a

time—when civilization has to be renewed by the discovery of mysteries, by the undemocratic but sovereign power of the imagination, by the undemocratic power which makes poets the unacknowledged legislators of mankind, the power which makes all things new.

(*AM*: 4)

He needs to overcome the clash implied by the differences he finds between ‘undemocratic poetry’ and the poetic logic capable of sustaining the mystery. Brown has to recall something from Vico that Vico ostensibly forgets: ‘*Poetic sublimity is inseparable from popularity*’ (*CT*: 107; *NS*: 875). And this sublimity, property of the early peoples who emerged from the first barbarism after the flood, also applies to the emergence of humanity from the barbarism of reflection. Poetic language was denied to the ‘elite’ by Vico because hitherto it is only possible to poeticise without reflection, in a ‘natural’ relationship to the world. There is, Vico argues, no esoteric ‘wisdom’ in Homer, because he was nothing but the Greek people themselves, the unreflexive comprehension of their late-animistic/early theological world. The elite proper, the aristocracy, do not arise, Vico argues, until the poetic has begun to be debased.

But even outside of Vico’s fanciful histories, to return language to poetry is to return it to the people, to the masses and to the gods. And this is the possibility of a return of the mystery in the ‘vulgar’, or perhaps rather, in the popular. This is also the definition of Emerson’s poet in the essay of that name, when he writes, ‘The people fancy they hate poetry, and they are all poets and mystics!’ (*Essays*: 212). Poetry is not something we can choose to do, it is only something we can choose to ignore. Poets, Emerson asserts, ‘are thus liberating gods’ (*Essays*: 221). They *divine* the flux of nature and provide the flexible symbols that disclose its being. Which ties into one last reflection on the ΦBK passage: that in Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* the alphabet is brought back to the spirit of the ideogram or the hieroglyph, the meaning of his words are, once again, a

mystery. But, in some way, a democratic mystery, albeit a problematic one; not democratic in the sense that Brown fears in this ΦBK address, ‘the attempt to democratize knowledge—the attempt to substitute method for insight, mediocrity for genius,’ but in the sense of Viconian democracy outlined above: in *Finnegans Wake* there is too much meaning—it is an abyss—and because of this *choices* have to be made in its interpretation. This may not be an obvious or even a politically significant idea of democracy, it certainly does not include any of its pretensions to clarity, but it does gather philosophical weight from the ‘vulgar’ metaphysics outlined in the *New Science*, even if it goes a long way to turning Vico on his head. Brown relishes the surfeit of meaning in Joyce just as he finds it in the *New Science*—these books, then, are an initiation into the oxymoronic hermeneutic of the democratic mysteries.

Vico’s poetic logic is the ‘vulgar’ knowledge that, in his poetic metaphysics, brings to presence a world which belongs to the *demoi*: ‘*The map of souls’ groupography*’ (CT: 109; FW: 476). Poetic metaphysics is ‘vulgar metaphysics,’ it vulgarises the Gods, it vulgarises the truth, it vulgarises knowledge and it vulgarises ‘being’ itself, bringing them all under the rubric of ‘poetry’ and, ultimately, of the corporeal body. It enacts the reversal proposed by Novalis at the beginning of this thesis: to make the finite infinite and the infinite everyday. It is also the consummation of that very problematic outlined by nihilism, where the so called higher things, spirit, *logos*, God, etc., are brought within the circle of *Homo Faber* and found not to be from another world, a better world, but to be *made* from the working out of human limitations—transcendent lack—inherent in the human body as *posse finitum*. But in this ‘lack,’ this essential finitude drifting through the flux, lies all the potential gathered from human history. The chiasmus that moves between the poetry of origins and the origins of poetry has, ultimately, radically different mean-

ings for Brown and for Vico. Viconian origins are historical, they are situated in the past and emerge from the Godless through the truth of the one Providential God, and then descend into anomie. But for Brown the origin exists in every moment as *poiesis*, as a transformed relation to the moment, and the dialectic of its history is the inverse of Vico's, it moves from the one God, Jove, *ius omni*, to a secular apotheosis of the human.

—Conclusion—
Transatlantic Romanticism

Norman O. Brown's recourse to myth and symbol, and Herbert Marcuse's rejection of the same, would stand comparison with one of the major themes of American Studies, namely, the place of myth and symbol in grounding the idea of America. Though it is unlikely that either Brown or Marcuse is making a conscious contribution to this field, it is apparent that they consider America's metaphorical heritage in an analogous way to the myth and symbol school. For Brown it figures a controlling ideality of what may constitute America; not America as a formal or Platonic idea, or an asymptotic gauge of religious perfection, but as a subjective projection of human possibility emerging from the finite hermeneutic of logos, mythos, and symbolism that I have traced in the preceding pages. For Marcuse, America figures an overlooked ideological disjunction between appearance and reality that must give way before rational critique. America is the telos of the dialectic of Enlightenment writ large. For both men, myth and symbol is part critique and part celebration of America's unique compact: its 'self-creation.' And what America becomes for Brown and Marcuse is not a 'place' that can be empirically or historiographically mapped, but rather an *idea*. It is an 'aesthetic idea,' in the Kantian sense, which transcends Europe, through Europe's own inherent logic of metaphor. In this conclusion I shall briefly examine the relationship between an American romanticism, again represented by Emerson, and the transatlantic construction and destruction of America's mythography by Brown and Marcuse.

Europe has recently taken up a significant metatheoretical posture within American Studies: it is both the view from outside, from European Americanists, and it is a

marker of what American Studies has excluded.¹ I want to extend what has hitherto been seen as a problem of literary history into a more philosophical—metaphysical—argument. This manoeuvre is foreshadowed by Sacvan Bercovitch writing in 1986:

We need a forum where native Americanists (if I may call them so), scholars trained in the rhetoric and rituals of ‘Americanness,’ can learn from their colleagues abroad to re-see American literature in an international perspective. It may well be that this will alter our very concept of ‘Americanness’ by recontextualising it—for example, by accentuating Emerson’s links to Descartes on the one hand and to Nietzsche on the other, or by replacing the tautologies of exceptionalism with the transnational categories of gender, class and race, or simply by extending the problematics of ‘art and expression’ to accommodate the classics produced by marginal or excluded groups of the age. It may be even that this comparatist perspective will eventuate a shift in the literary center of gravity from the nationalist American Renaissance to the transatlantic enterprise of a later era...²

This is a call to the new literary history that emerges in the 1980s and comes to dominate the interpretations of American literature in the 1990s.³ However, it also points to the philosophical position I have been arguing throughout this thesis.⁴ Though, by ‘transatlantic enterprise,’ Bercovitch means the literary modernism of American exiles in the twentieth century, what he does not mention is that America itself—as a metaphysical compact—is founded on an earlier transatlantic enterprise. It is not only what America can *find* in Europe, a critical distance, that is important, but also what Europe *founded* in America—indeed, *as* America. Exceptionalism does not just break apart in the twentieth

¹ See Paul Giles, ‘Reconstructing American Studies: Transnational Paradoxes, Comparative Perspectives,’ *Journal of American Studies* (Vol. 28, No. 3, 1994), pp. 335-358; ‘Virtual Americas: The Internationalization of American Studies and the Ideology of Exchange,’ *American Quarterly* (Vol. 50, No. 3, 1998), 523-547.

² Sacvan Bercovitch, ‘The Problem of Ideology in American Literary History,’ *Critical Inquiry* (No. 12, Summer 1986), p. 652. Hereafter referred to as PI in the text. In part cited in Giles 1994 above.

³ See, for example, Bercovitch ed. *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen eds. *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁴ It is perhaps unfortunate that Bercovitch mentions Descartes—I would rather suggest either Kant or Hume as the place to begin—but, nevertheless, his comments are significant in the context of the approach I have been taking.

century with America's increased presence on the international scene of culture; rather, from its inception, the Atlantic is a space of crossings rather than a fixed border.⁵

I made this point in Chapter 1 with regard to Emerson, when I argued that it is important to locate him not as an American original, the source of its literary renaissance, but rather as an inheritor of a European philosophical tradition—we need to locate Emerson *in medias res*. Indeed, I would suggest polemically that throughout his intellectual maturity Emerson was rarely informed by anything more 'American' than the landscape.⁶ This, however, has always been enough for the inward eye of American Studies, and indeed, it is part of the mythographical territory—virgin land, etc.—on which the discipline was founded after World War Two. The one thing that Americans could rely on to separate them from Europe was that the matter on which they stood: the landscape of a New World. But the landscape, as shown in Chapter 1, is not given empirically, but is founded on the 'integrative' eye of the poet, and held at a distance by experience.

I do not think it necessary to rehearse the myth and symbol debate at this late stage, and it is well known. Rather, I shall briefly expand upon a particular circuit of ideas that have come to surround it: metaphor and ideology. As Bercovitch has observed:

Without quite articulating it as a principle of analysis, American Studies taught by example, in practice, that rhetoric is not a surface coating, 'merely metaphor,' upon the deep structures of the real. It is substantially,

⁵ Paul Gilroy has made good use of this metaphor in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

⁶ In John D. Richardson's exemplary intellectual biography of Emerson his only significant 'indigenous' sources are the Puritan and Unitarian traditions—themselves hardly 'American'—which he largely rejects in favour of European scientific, critical, idealist and romantic thought. John D. Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995).

fundamentally, what the real is, even (or especially) when the rhetoric serves to repress and deny.⁷

This sounds like something that I have been repeating throughout this thesis; it sounds like the basic principles of idealism, which are in turn denied (as ideology). Metaphor was revealed as constitutive by Vico in 1744, and the position was repeated by the romantics in successive generations, and was preached loudly by Brown in the 1960s. In this way, American Studies, *The New Science*, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 'Experience' and *Love's Body* are connected: they each rest on the grounding capacity of metaphor, or the ideality of the 'real.' Now, it is clear that for Brown this ideality or metaphoricality is more explicit than for the discipline of American Studies. The latter would not attach itself to a romantic position that recognises the investment of the self in the creation of meaning, which is in both myth and metaphor as a measure of the body. In its early period, American Studies might find itself accepting these tropes as helpful indicators of an essential identity. In its later period, where Bercovitch sits for example, it would see this as more or less a problem of ideology—the very fact that America *has* an ideology—which may be read from the 'naïve' constellations of myths that found its literary tradition. The latter critical tradition evolves from late Marxism, where ideology is the inescapable burden of social life, and from the Foucauldian New Historicism, which sees ideology as a discourse of power shaping disciplines such as gender and class.

I do not want to pursue either of these views further here. I want to position this argument in terms familiar from Brown and Marcuse, where, in the first case, myth is the ability to partake in the production of phenomena and, in the second case, myth is

⁷ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 12. Hereafter referred to as *RA* in the text.

seen as an aberrant aesthetic—a kind of relapse into mysticism—to be combated by dialectics. Whilst both of these manoeuvres are romantic, the first, I shall argue, belongs to the crisis of idealism turning into romanticism, the second, to romanticism turning into idealism.

In what way can a particular romantic image be seen as grounding American metaphor? There is perhaps one trope above all others which can be seen in this light—indeed, it often creates the light by which American Culture is viewed: Self-Reliance. Earlier I asked, with Emerson: what is the *aboriginal* self on which, for example, the American scholar, the poet and the transcendentalist, may rely? Emerson's answer to this question is quite simple, and, coming from the opening paragraph of *Nature*, it could be said to inaugurate *the* romantic American Myth: "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?" (*SE*: 35). That is, who are we that we should need the authority of others to address ourselves to the universe, to constitute 'our' country, but, moreover, who might we become if we *did not* require such authority? Donald Pease has observed that the words 'original' and 'also' in this citation appear contradictory. He argues this is a deliberate way to display an intergenerational conflict and identification between Emerson and the founding fathers over the questions of authority and 'independence.'⁸ Therefore, these foregoing generations to which Emerson refers himself are not from the book of Genesis or Rousseau, but rather the immediately preceding generation of the revolutionary fathers.⁹ Emerson is contesting the ground of the rhetorical posi-

⁸ Donald Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 222. Hereafter referred to as *VC* in the text.

⁹ Pease argues that *Nature* is, in part, a riposte to Emerson's one time idol, Daniel Webster's 1825 Bunker Hill speech in which the 'we' of which Emerson speaks are condescended to as children 'standing on the sepulchres of our fathers' (*VC*: 214).

tion on which authority stands, or rather lies, in these men and their works—the creation of independence, the founding myth or the myth of founding.

When Emerson writes that he *also* wants to enjoy an *original* relation to the universe, he is contending for the same source of power—that of *nature*—that has been granted to the fathers. He is by no means obviating their right to it, but is extending that right to *all*. Pease concludes that '[n]either the fathers nor “we” emerge as primary in this power struggle, but rather *the relation effecting itself through both as an ever-renewed power*' (*VC*: 223; emphasis added). Power is not bestowed, it has no history, it does not arise from birth or tradition, it is not found in some Golden Age, and the quantity and quality of power are not diminished through time. Power is only veiled in tradition and, moreover, in the rhetoric of tradition. Independence is the creature of the now, of the everyday. This is confirmed in 1854, when Emerson writes in his journal: "The American independence that is a legend. *Your independence!* that is the question of all the Present. Have you thought out that? & settled in once again' (*Journals*: 456). This is why, in 1836, Emerson writes *Nature*, to locate the authority of the American people and to give it over to those people. To remind them that they were born in possession and that theirs is the perpetual struggle of the present against history, for its unsettlement. And this, perhaps, is why Dewey called him the 'Philosopher of Democracy' (*CCE*: 29). It is also what he comes to mean by self-reliance: a wrestling with tradition for an original relationship with the universe. Self-reliance is self-creation.

The location of this original relationship is also well known: it is the unity of the eye and the I; what I have called the romanticist's investment of the self in the creation of meaning through metaphor and myth. American Studies, however, has held a different view of this transcendence. Bercovitch, for example, sees the 'P' as a *triumphalist* pos-

essor of the new American—he cites Emerson’s identification with Columbus, again from *Nature*:

When the bark of Columbus nears the shore of America;—before it, the beach lined with savages, fleeing out of their huts of cane; the sea behind; and the purple mountain of the Indian Archipelago around, can we separate the man from the living picture? Does not the New World clothe his form with her palm-groves and savannahs as fit drapery?

(RA: 25)

For Bercovitch this rhetorical excess is too redolent of an imperialist mode of discovery, of ‘Columbus draped in nature’s purple’ (RA: 26); it is the rhetoric of triumph, the ‘*veni-vidi-vici*’ (RA: 26) of a territory comprising the circumference of the eye’s horizon. This is the America, he claims, which Emerson comes to appropriate, to render it into a transcendental unity with the self and with God. To an extent, I think Bercovitch is correct; the young Emerson of *Nature* does desire such a union, for America to be part and parcel of God. But it is the very ambivalence of this desire, of the nature of deferral in desire, that Bercovitch overlooks, particularly when he sets the triumphalist discovery of ‘America’ alongside extracts of the following passage from ‘Experience.’

When I converse with a profound mind, or if at any time, being alone, I have good thoughts, I do not at once arrive at satisfaction, as when, being thirsty, I drink water, or go to the fire being cold: no! but I am at first apprised of my vicinity to a new and excellent region of life. By persisting to read or to think, this region gives further sign of itself, as it were in flashes of light, in sudden discoveries of its profound beauty and repose, as if the clouds that covered it parted at intervals, and showed the approaching traveller the *inland mountains, with the tranquil eternal meadows spread at their base*, whereon flocks graze, and the shepherds pipe and dance. But every insight from this realm of thought is felt as initial, and promises a sequel. I do not make it; *I arrive there, and behold what was there already*. I make! O no! I clap my hands in infantine joy and amazement, before the first opening to me of innumerable ages, young with the life of life, the sunbright Mecca of the desert. *And what a future it opens!* I feel a new heart beating with the love of the new beauty. I am ready to die out of nature, and be born again into this

new, yet unapproachable America I have found in the West.

(*Essays*: 243-244)

In this passage the landscape—the unseen temperate continent—is profoundly changed from a vision of America as a discoverable and conquerable territory to a vision of *thinking*. I have here italicised Bercovitch's citations, and from their context, it is clear that the physical space of America and the metaphysical locutions of Emerson's description of thought are ambiguously shared: the mental and material landscapes are doubled. However, what also becomes apparent is a lack of triumphalism, a kind of withdrawal of the authority of the self from the picture it paints. Bercovitch's citations cut off this ambivalence of discovery and creation: 'I do not make it; *I arrive there, and behold what was there already*. I make! O no!' Emerson appears unsure whether he has created the image of the inland mountains or whether the country precedes his imagination. His indecision is merely a metaphor for the succession of thoughts. But Emerson is not by this ceding authority to the 'material' world, that is to any kind of empirical encounter, but rather to the aboriginal self—the self that arrives prior to thought and upon which the possibility of thought is based.

It is worth returning here to my prior invocation of Emerson's aboriginal self, where I argued that it figures the romantic twin of Kant's transcendental apperception; that is, Emerson's 'star without parallax' set against the sureties of the Copernican Revolution's 'I think.' There is an emptiness here that belongs not to the as yet undiscovered country of America, but rather to the heart of Emerson's rhetorical appropriation of himself. It corresponds to the word that usually remains unanalysed in the infamous epiphanic moment of *Nature*: 'I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God' (*SE*:

39). In order to see at all Emerson must become *nothing*. This is the emptiness at the centre of experience (indeed, as we have seen, at the centre of ‘Experience’). The self of self-reliance is not merely transparent, it is nothing—no-thing. Nature, which Emerson is perceived as appropriating, is here, as with Kant, either merely the transcendental self (narcissism) or a transcendent nothing. As a corollary the aboriginal self, the self of self-reliance, one of the grounding metaphor-come-myths of America, is actually nothing at all—and all the more forceful and enduring because of it. As Pease puts it: ‘Emerson’s transparent eyeball is not a metaphor for another term; it is the original relation out of which metaphors can be made, which Emerson will later call the faculty of self-reliance’ (*VC*: 226). It is neither a steadfast individuality, nor an invidious individualism;¹⁰ it is, rather, the empty subject of America that is still to be found, that is to be founded—this new, yet unapproachable America.

Emerson discovers the same space at the heart of his American experience that Brown does. Emerson’s ‘eye/I’ is the equivalent of Brown’s ‘body,’ it is that which cannot be represented because it is the source of all representation; that which cannot be known because it is the source of knowing. Self-reliance is grounded on the same ambivalence as love’s body, that is, on the undecidable nature of phenomenal experience. It is a myth: the transparent construction of a willed identity that can follow no model, but must belong to an original relation to the universe. It can come as no surprise, then, that Emerson influences Nietzsche.

To dialectical thinking, the ambivalence that fails to locate either the creator or the created, but falls back into emptiness or nothingness actually yields a clue as to the process of the overcoming of that relation. The created and the creator are, dialectics

¹⁰ See *RA*: 309ff.

argues, mutually determined; this is a process of substance as subject and the dialectic of nature that was developed in Chapter 2. Here the ‘nothing,’ or the unknowable self that Emerson centres his eye upon, or Brown his body, becomes rather the self-movement of history. It is an openness to the world that is mediated and sublated by the subject of history. Whereas for Brown and for Emerson there is an indivisible remainder to all knowledge—a necessary acknowledgement of a mystery (‘Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Always our being is descending into us from we know not whence’ [*Essays*: 149])—for Marcuse, history moves as totality and brings knowledge along with it. Myth, then, as this self-willed cognitive pattern that reveals a world by letting part of it remain forever undisclosed, is an inadequate, indeed a dangerous, mode of knowledge. Myth, in this sense, is un-dialectical because it does not move toward the *telos* of reason—indeed, it may claim that ‘*telos*’ as one of its own creations.

Marcuse, as his critique of Brown, ‘Love Mystified’ makes clear, considers myth to be a mystifying false consciousness. However, he has his own ambivalence about myth, as *One Dimensional Man* reveals.

To be sure, mythology is primitive and immature thought. The process of civilization invalidates myth (this is almost a definition of progress), but it may also return rational thought to mythological status. In the latter case theories which identify and project historical possibilities may become irrational, or rather appear irrational because they contradict the rationality of the established universe of discourse and behaviour.¹¹

The ambiguity is not, in fact, a defence of myth. What Marcuse means to do here is to rescue the concept of the revolution—indeed, of non-conformism—which becomes a myth under modern conditions. Critical Theory itself, and particularly the dialectic of

¹¹ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 188. Hereafter referred to as *ODM* in the text.

Enlightenment, in these terms, contains a mythology, or what might better be termed an irrational and unscientific character. And this is necessary because under present conditions (c. 1964), the proletariat becomes a myth for advanced industrial society and Marxism a myth for the reality of contemporary socialism. Myth, to return to a Hegelian vocabulary, is that which is more real than the actual: myth is the determinate negation of that which is what it is only by not fulfilling its essence. Critical thinking seems to assert a mythology, but its ‘mythological quality reflects the mystifying quality of the given facts—the deceptive harmonization of the societal contradictions’ (*ODM*: 189).

Myth is here analogous to the aesthetic; it serves a reflexive critical function without the authority to realize itself. It acts as a counter myth to the actuality of current conditions and as an external beacon, but it is rendered irrational by those conditions. So, between Brown and Marcuse we are dealing with two very different kinds of myth. In the first instance myth is will: shaping oneself and the world in accordance with the authority of one’s own creative finitude. In the latter instance myth is purely a negative force, rendered mythological by the prevailing attitudes of societal norms. For Marcuse myth is refuted when rational thought pierces the veil of ideology, for Brown myth is the ideology we see through—‘the veil we spin to hide the void.’

Love’s Body and *Closing Time* comprise Brown’s own secular theogony based on the myth of the divine human established from the imaginative extension of the body, love’s body. It is here that we find the most distance between him and Marcuse. For Marcuse the body falls away to reveal the dialectic of history, the subject of history, and any idea that reasserts the divine is contrary to emancipatory reason, is anathema. But which of these two directions, the body or the subject, holds on to the promise of ro-

manticism? Which exerts itself most fully in that no-place opened up by romanticism's failure? Are they in fact both representatives of its possible directions?

I shall answer this question and end this study by returning again to the post-Kantian *Urszene* of romanticism, the impossible coupling of reason and understanding, the noumenal and the phenomenal, in Novalis' assertion that:

By giving the commonplace a higher sense, the usual a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite an infinite appearance, I romanticise it—The operation is the other way round for the higher, the unknown, the mystical, the infinite. (*RCT*: 80)

It is important to remember that romanticism does not just comprise of the ascension of the mundane but also the 'going down,' to recall Nietzsche's phrase, of the higher. This is why we find the romantic so difficult to locate, it is moving in two directions simultaneously and with reference to two different realms—the knowable and the unknowable. At the heart of everything that is romantic, as the crisis of idealism, lies this irresolvable, yet fruitful, dialectic. Emerson responded to this when, faced with the death of his son and the limits of experience, he pointed to the feeling of omniscience and omnignorance, for all the awkwardness of the coinage.

But, of course, this *Urszene* never happens, and the attempts to force it have only emerged, retroactively, as symptom and phantasy—like, perhaps, America itself. Nevertheless, as we have seen repeated repeatedly, the space of phantasy is where otherness enters, an otherness that is neither always recognisable nor always tolerable. This is why Critchley called romanticism naïve and why Cavell saw it as comparable to the sceptical intuition that things can always be different, maybe even better. Which recalls Berco-vitch's contention that America is the figure that, through its literature, is able to co-opt both consensus and dissensus, one that 'absorb[s] the spirit of protest for social ends

[through its] rhetoric of dissent [and which] redefined radicalism itself as an affirmation of cultural values' (PI: 645). America's utopian potential is actually increased by its failure precisely because of its symbolic construction: "America" as a synonym for human possibility' (PI: 645). This type of construction, as has been shown with romanticism, opens up the possibility of that sought for other but it remains unrealizable. It is the dialectic of hope and despair that emerges from the mid-world (Emerson's phrase) of the between worlds of the Kantian settlement. For the romantic, America figures this 'in-between,' where on the one hand, it represents—but only represents—the hope of a noumenal fulfilment, and on the other, it is the hypostatization of a phenomenal myth that leads to a kind of despair that does not match the promise. For Kant, I think, romanticism, would be one continuous subreption—or category error—a continual attempt to assert the impossible in terms of the possible.

Yet, if we take this position as granted, and moreover as romanticism's strength, then we are left with the choice between these two directions. We may, with Brown, wholeheartedly follow the promise of the symbolic imagination, turning everything into body and welcoming the attendant disorder. Or we may, with Marcuse, throw out phantasy as a guiding line; to pursue it only as far as reason will stretch, and thus allow the imagination to exist on the other side of a boundary—a no-place. The former, I have argued, leads to poetry; the latter, it seems clear leads to a critical theory which preserves the tension in idealism between the real and the reasonable—but where the reasonable is lead by the regulative ideas of the imagination, and where the imagination is reason trumping itself. This tension is snapped by Brown's adherence to symbolism, rejecting the possibility of reality and the reasonable coming together describing only their difference: the imagination. What Marcuse calls the real, the historical unfolding of reason,

has no meaning for Brown aside from that yielded by the authority of the imagination, and it is no ground, merely another misrecognised mythology. Both these positions, though, emerge from the problems that locate the romantic tradition.

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