

Signature Event C\*ntext

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines how context in Derridean signature theory is taboo and underutilized, and calls signature theory to embrace the contaminating mark of context. Signature theory, as proposed by Jacques Derrida and Peggy Kamuf, offers a mere glimpse into Romanticism's strained relationship with the signature, with a close reading limited to Rousseau. This thesis widens the scope of existing signature scholarship, and expands the context of the signature by focusing on a variety of signatures, events and contexts to reveal that the slipperiness of the signature is a pervasive problem, irreducible to simply just Rousseau. This thesis does not involve a return to the origin, or a search for origins; Part I is a return to the period which Derridean signature theory investigates, in an attempt to interrogate Derrida, Kamuf, and the signature itself; expanding the concept of the signature through its various manifestations of handwork and linework, and weaving together a more complicated, contaminated, and ultimately convincing context for signature theory to begin (again) from. Part II forces signature theory to begin again by putting it into practice. Here, I take Kamuf to task for her failure to fully 'contract' the signature. She completely ignores the physical dimension of the word 'contract.' Going one step further than simply critiquing her signature practices, I 'contract' the signature by having Derrida's signature tattooed on my body. The tattoo and its location comment on the current limitations of signature theory, and perhaps of academic practice generally; of contracting without touching, and fearing contexts.

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*This interweaving,  
this textile, is the text  
produced only in the  
transformation of  
another text. Nothing,  
neither among the  
elements nor within  
the system, is  
anywhere ever simply  
present or absent.  
There are only,  
everywhere,  
differences and traces  
of traces.*

- Derrida Positions 26

*(My) Signature*

Compulsive doodling and drawing – on notebooks, textbooks, desks, walls, bibles and bathroom stalls, toilet paper and shoe soles. Scrawling the names of favourite bands and classroom crushes – but, most importantly, and admittedly narcissistically, my own. My signature.

Sign. Sign. Sign.

Fittingly, signature anagrammatically spells “art genius,” as well as “stain urge.”

Ultimately, I have always already been engaged with the signature, in practice first, in theory second. Signature theory, which grows specifically out of Jacques Derrida, continues to haunt my notebooks, and mark the terrain of my scholarship.

What follows is a reversal in two parts; first, an engagement with the signature in theory, and then, in practice.

## CHAPTER 1: Signature Theory

A signature is in effect a promise. It ‘says’ “I am the person I say I am.” It is taken to be the truthful extension of oneself; the inky standing-in when the body cannot. As Derrida in “Signature Event Context” explains,

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of nowness [...]. This general *maintenance* is somehow inscribed, stapled to present punctuality, always evident and always singular, in the form of the signature. Such is the enigmatic originality of every paraph. For the attachment to the source to occur, the absolute singularity of an event of the signature and of a form of the signature must be retained: the pure reproducibility of a pure event. (328)

The signature also promises that whatever it is attached to, either paper or plastic, is its property, as in the sense of lawful; lawful name, lawful owner, lawful words. The signature is a writable and readable sign; a manifestation of a name. It is the proper name that is generally accepted as part of that which makes us individual; my name is different than yours, and hers, and his, etc., Derrida interrupts such classical thinking and notes that while your name is different it is also (necessarily) the same – you can share the same name with someone else; and in that sense it is repeatable, ergo, not singular nor individual; not your property at all. It is also not individual in the way a name needs to be recognizable as a name, or ‘readable’ as Derrida says. Niall Lucy gives the great example



of Prince, when he changed his name to a symbol, “which no one could *say* at all” (104); and yet this symbol is still recognizable as a sign, a signature, as that which signals and symbolizes a specific artist. If it is recognizable, as it must be in order to function as a signature, it is part of a code. As Lucy notes, “the propriety of ‘one’s own’ proper name relies on being formed out of general signifying elements that are *not* one’s own – elements that are improper. Impropriety is every proper name’s condition of possibility” (104). We are familiar with impropriety in the sense of actions, of someone not knowing their boundaries (ie. going ‘outside’ a marriage, ‘more than’ friends, going ‘too far,’ ‘crossing a line’). It is this sense of impropriety, this non-property that describes the nature of the signature and its relation to the name. The non-ownership of impropriety also speaks to the larger form, “if it has one,” of deconstruction which, as Peggy Kamuf notes, consists of “pieces that are at once fragments of a totality that never was and parts of a whole that cannot cohere” (Signature Pieces 17). This description of deconstruction offers a fitting terministic screen of self-reflexivity through which to interrogate the border or boundary between the proper name and signature.

Kamuf describes both the signature and the proper name:

A signature is not a name; at most it is a piece of a name, its citation according to certain rules... As a piece of a proper name, the signature points, at one extremity, to a properly unnameable singularity; as a piece of language, the signature touches, at its other extremity, on the space of free substitution without proper reference. At the edge of the work, the dividing trait of the signature pulls in both directions at once: appropriating the text under the sign of the name, expropriating

the name into the play of the text. The undecidable trait of the signature must fall into the crack of the historicist/formalist opposition organizing most discourses about literature. (12-13)

Kamuf's musings on Rousseau's troubled relation with his signature provides her with, as William Ray notes, "a paradigmatic case of the slipperiness of authorizing signature, authorial identity, and literary properties" (310).

Following Derrida, Kamuf describes the trouble with Rousseau's attempt at regulating his literary identity and intentions. She notes that after Derrida, who has read Rousseau in light of the signature debacle, 'Rousseau' the name is changed: "'Rousseau' is the name of a problem, the problem of the idealist exclusion of writing- of materiality, of exteriority – in the name of the subject's presence to itself" (24). Rousseau bears and becomes the mark, then; the first to attempt to authenticate the signature, to solidify who signs, by performing a self-reflexive analysis on "'himself' in somewhat the same way that Freud, the founder of another institution of self-reflection, had to perform his own analysis" (25). Kamuf identifies Rousseau's Confessions as the text that attempts to

justify and authenticate a signature already circulating widely so that, at a certain point in its career (after the ban on *Emile* and the pursuit of the author), his signature is entirely concerned with *countersigning* what had already been signed. And it is this necessity of doubling itself that marks a certain turn in the history of signature [...] Doubling itself, the signature 'Rousseau' uncovers what must always divide it; it exposes the limit at which one signs – and signs again. (25-6)

It is this initial documentation that leads Kamuf to credit Rousseau with the birth of the “narrativization of the signature” (26).

Apart from the analysis of Rousseau, Kamuf cycles through how the various situations or signature contexts, such as the legal signature, function. While Kamuf notes that in the act of signing your signature becomes more than a name, it becomes a mark, she overlooks that this mark is also affixed to another mark; the signature is affixed both to a mark (sign at the ‘X’, on the ‘dotted-line’) and as a mark (unique to you and yet necessarily repeatable – the same, but different).

Still, whereas other critics, such as Niall Lucy, are adamant about establishing the difference between the signature and proper name, Kamuf more fittingly focuses on the contexts wherein the aforementioned forms and functions blur:

conventional understanding is loosened and we are allowed to see the signature operating on its own, so to speak, as a particular use of the proper name. Such occasions are written works (literature in the general sense) bearing an author’s signature which also make bare its uncertain operation. (ix)

Kamuf argues that “the modern study of literature has largely contrived to look away from this exposed condition of the signature,” and in doing so has disguised the signature in “various guises: psychological, historical, formal, ideological” which together constitute our pervasive conception and institution of authorship, “an institution that masks or recuperates the disruptive implications of literary signature” (ix-x). Kamuf positions the signature and proper name as transitory categories/forms with and in the

slipperiness of the phenomenon of authorship, a phenomenon and economy which is almost always presented in an antithetical way; stable, authoritative, singular.

Kamuf's engagement with signature theory offers a glimpse into the eighteenth-century's "vexed relationship" with the signature, as Ray poignantly describes (310) it, but also, more generally, deconstruction's and postmodernism's obvious affinity for this slippery figure. However, as Derrida and Kamuf limit their examinations to a close reading of Rousseau, I feel there is a need to widen the scope of their signature investigations. It is from this "crack," the place where Kamuf identifies signature theory has slipped, that I expand the eighteenth-century's vexed relationship with the signature, by focusing on a variety of actual signatures, events and (con)texts – from male and female writers, scientists, workers – to reveal that the slipperiness of the signature is a pervasive problem for the eighteenth-century, irreducible to simply just Rousseau. I argue that the Romantics are very much aware of and anxious about the slipperiness of the signature, and as such, this anxiety is manifested more generally in a variety of anxieties over other slippery lines. It is part of a larger problem over hand(i)work. Additionally, looking at the larger historical base of the Derridean focus on the signature, since it seems to be primarily grounded in a specific period, reveals the way technology affects the relationship between the hand and the line, increasing the anxiety.

Ironically, the limitation of Derrida and Kamuf's examination and theorization of the signature is their lack of thoroughly scrutinizing the events and contexts in which the signature is problematized.

This thesis does not involve a return to the origin, or a search for origins; Part I is a return to the period which Derridean signature theory investigates, in attempt of interrogating Derrida, Kamuf, and the signature itself; expanding the concept of the signature through its various manifestations of handwork and linework, and weaving together a more complicated, contaminated, and ultimately convincing context for signature theory to begin (again) from. I force signature theory to begin again by putting it into practice.

In Part II, I take Kamuf to task for her failure to fully ‘contract’ the signature. She completely ignores the physical dimension of the word ‘contract.’ Going one step further than simply critiquing her signature practices, I literally, physically ‘contract’ the signature via tattooing Derrida’s signature on my body. The tattoo and its location comment on the current limitations in signature theory, and perhaps of academic practice generally; of contracting without touching, and fearing contexts.

What better way to ground something, or reinforce its visceral nature than by writing it on the genitals; a location that is always already contaminated, in part by being overwritten, marked by and a mark of difference – a metonym for wound, as either circumcision or genital mutilation; a fitting place both to write of the signature which is cut off from the signing body, and to cut the signature into the body. This is a writing of that which cuts, and a cutting of that which writes.

Anxieties over the line are far more manifest than Derrida or Kamuf admit; the threat of the line, its dangerous uncontrollability is revealed in the period in many text/ual/ile ways. As such, we can see the signature as metaphorically standing in for the fleshy human in so far as its own slippery position is analogous to the human weaver's slippery position in relation to the line and the machine (frame – framing technologies). This study offers a more fleshed out rationale behind choosing the Romantic period as the starting place for signature theory – adding more complexity and cuntaminates, more surface and depth, to the existing model of the signature.

Our investiture in the line (either thread or ink) is accelerated by the implementation of technologies that threaten to take power over the line, reflected in the rhetoric of those dealing with the line, the line emanating from the hand, as a kind of madness. The anxiety occurs over the shifting focus from line work to frame work. The relationship between these two textual/textile economies in the eighteenth century is often characterized/met by anxiety and unruliness – for example, the weaver and ruler relationship that Kamuf cites. The anxiety over the line manifests itself in violent outbreaks by the Luddites, in off-limits sexuality in Jane Taylor, in the framing of monstrosity in Mary Shelley, and in the cheeky figures and signatures of William Blake.

In the twentieth century another seismic shift occurs between line work and framework. However, rather than being met with violence, this shift towards the framework is met with anti-aesthetic tendencies. I examine Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl as an example of this ugliness.

Where the signature can be a source of anxiety, if you attempt to control it, it can also be a source for postmodern play, if you let it loose – as is often manifest in variations of patchwriting, *play*giarism, and here, in a thesis which crosses the line, in an act that will physically literalize its subcutaneous slipperiness.

## CHAPTER 2: Kamuf's (selective) Blindness

Kamuf's third chapter in Signature Pieces, titled "Contracting the Signature," again addresses Rousseau, although this time for his authorial voice in Of the Social Contract. Here, Kamuf cross-examines the etymology of Rousseau's title, and traces the sense of 'contract' to "the semantic field of *tractum*, the tuft of wool drawn first into a thread before being twisted with other threads [...] and drawn through the warp" (43). While Kamuf astutely connects interlocking (fabric) with interlocuting, suggesting that "[w]eaving is a metaphor for ruling, which is a metaphor for writing, which is a metaphor..." this "double art" is also a double-standard (45). Kamuf's figure of the "weaver/ruler" finds its contradiction, if not a double-contradiction, within itself; particularly as it is placed within the context of Rousseau's time, wherein the weaver figure could hardly be equated with a ruler figure.

The weaver/ruler is a contradiction given the situation of weavers during the Romantic era, which is the very same time period/framework Kamuf uses to contextualize the weaver/ruler. Rather than rulers, whom we might loosely characterize as public figures with particular power and the status of nobility, weavers were marginal figures, the most famous of which were Luddites, and carried with them the status of notoriety rather than nobility.

The parliamentary speeches of the time capture particularly well the oppositional rather than complementary relationship between the weavers (Luddites) and rulers (Tory



government). Evidence of this relationship is found in Lord Byron's parliamentary speech to the House of Lords, on February 27, 1812, where he debates the Frame Work Bill. Anne Mellor explains, in a footnote to Byron's speech, that in November 1811, the unemployed stocking weavers of Nottingham (also known as "Luddites"), some of them near the point of starvation, began rioting and breaking the mechanized weaving frames that were costing them their jobs. The militia were called in, but were unable to stop the violence. The government then responded with the Tory-sponsored Frame Work Bill, which specified the death penalty for frame-breaking. (885)

The fact that the rulers introduced the death penalty for the weavers presents a difficult situation in which to conflate weaver and ruler. Kamuf's description of the weaver/ruler overlooks two critical aspects: the class division, as represented in the riotous reaction of the Luddites, and the gender issue associated with this line of textiles as women's handiwork.

### *Class*

Apart from the gendered aspect of weaving, and the other forms of handiwork, namely sewing, knitting, quilting, etc., Kamuf also ignores, at a more costly price, the class divisions that make the weaver/ruler figure hard to see appropriate or even useful. Using the revolt of the Luddites during the first decade of the nineteenth century as a concrete example of the weaver/ruler relationship, we are more apt to identify with those associated with weaving as the opposite of those associated with ruling. Sometimes,

much to the chagrin of the die-hard-Derridean, there are relationships which are, in all reality, oppositional. Only in the sense that the weaver and the ruler are on opposite sides, of the coin, typographically represented/separated by a forward slash. Still, surprisingly, this difference is not Kamuf's intention. Weavers, contrarily, were in direct and overt opposition to the government and its subsequent passing of the 1811 Frame Work Bill.

As Byron argues, “[b]y the adoption of one species of Frame in particular, one man performed the work of many, and the superfluous labourers were thrown out of employment,” causing the weavers to conceive “themselves to be sacrificed to improvements in mechanism” (885). In effect Byron suggests here, in advance of Heidegger, that it is being rendered obsolete that is at the heart of the matter:

These men never destroyed their looms till they were become useless, worse than useless; till they were become actual impediments to their exertions in obtaining their daily bread. Can you, then, wonder that in times like these, when bankruptcy, convicted fraud, and imputed felony are found in a station not far beneath that of your Lordships, the lowest, though once most useful portion of the people, should forget their duty in their distresses, and become only less guilty than one of their representatives? (886)

The only way in which weaver and ruler come remotely near one another is, as Byron reveals, in terms of the connection between the violence of the weavers and the violence of the politicians: “The framers of such a Bill must be content to inherit the honours of that Athenian lawgiver whose edicts were said to be written not in ink but in blood”

(886). The distance closes between the weaver and ruler figures only in consideration of the violence committed through their handiwork.

In a very roundabout way, the weaver/ruler figure comes together once the worker has been pushed out. Consider this: in a variety of senses, the mechanized frames brought in to replace the weavers would have been the ones doing the ‘ruling’ – in the sense of the actual ruling of lines, cutting, overall craftwork. As the machines replace the bodies of the weavers, these machines become the new weavers. Remembering that these mechanized weaving frames were defended by the government, we can come to align the weaver-machine with the ruler, each functioning as an extension of the other. Suddenly we are on the same grounds: weaver and ruler do in fact merge. However, this merging isn’t expounded by Kamuf, but more alarmingly, it isn’t possible to arrive at until the human has been drained and replaced by the machine. Working hard to make this point, partially in attempt of defending Kamuf whom I have sharply criticized, leaves me to offer a condition for the weaver/ruler figure to work. The condition to make Kamuf’s weaver/ruler figure effective, however, insists on trading man for machine; this formula ultimately then only further exacerbates the distance between the weaver and ruler, never mind trying to yoke them together into one term.

This anxiety over the line and frame, different kinds of handiwork in general, speaks to the connection and contention with industrialization, imperialism, and professionalization. In the professional arenas of art and education, tension between line and frame draws together with gender trouble in terms of women’s work and its relation

to the Frame. As I will explain later on, education is a kind of framing mechanism also capable of (sexual) violence.

### *Gender*

Furthermore, and perhaps even more surprisingly, Kamuf, without so much as a gesture or change in pronoun, doesn't address the fact that handiwork along the lines of sewing, knitting, weaving, was one of the few and important positions legitimated under the category of women's work during the nineteenth century. Had Kamuf examined the weaver/ruler figure in light of women's work, or more specifically women's writing from the period, she could have established a more legitimate context.

### *Stitch 'n Bitch*

Kamuf fails to mention, even in passing, the actual presence of the female weaver. This is particularly surprising considering the period she uses as her framework. As a quick survey of the literature from the Romantic period reveals there are a number of women writers who are either weavers themselves, or, who frequently use weaver imagery (quilting, sewing, tailoring) as their literary tropes.

One such woman, Jane Taylor, draws explicitly upon female accomplishments in her 1816 poem, "Accomplishment." Taylor sardonically critiques the education of both men and women: "That drapery wrought by the leisurely fair / Call'd *patchwork*, may well to

such genius compare” (9-10). Taylor suggests that a man’s education fails in that it gives him “every gift in the world, but a soul” (line 8), and a woman’s education is a lesser education, “showy, but void of intelligent grace” (19). Taylor seems content with neither gender’s state of education.

Carol Shiner Wilson understands the young woman in Taylor’s poem to be “nothing but a nervous confusion of mismatched fabric and design by her education [...] unfit to assume the role of the Good Mother who can lovingly educate her children” (177). Yet, in describing the young woman’s education as randomly thrown together, Wilson fails to note the deliberateness of this education. As Catherine Hobbs, in her examination of nineteenth-century literacy, notes, “[l]iteracy had become a key element in the social transformation to Victorian culture and the Cult of True Womanhood, with its tenets of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness” (10). And yet, for Jane Taylor, literacy also is a tool of subversion. While literacy is deeply connected to social control, there are always already private and idiosyncratic ways to cuntaminate it. Hobbs further notes that “[w]omen’s own power of active resistance to, or covert subversion of, efforts to socialize them remains another factor to consider,” and goes on to cite women’s collective groups and imagined societies as initiatives to achieve “social reform instead of social control” (10). However, Hobbs plays into the dominant ideologies about myths of the piety, purity, and domesticity of these cloistered female educational collectives. What Taylor evokes, and what Wilson and Hobbs overlook, is the subtext of an erotic lesbian economy behind women’s education.

Both sexuality and female education are the focus of “Accomplishment,” and as a footnote indicates, Taylor is responding specifically to the “female accomplishments” as outlined by Mary Wollstonecraft in Vindication of the Rights of Woman: “Besides, whilst [women] are only made to acquire personal accomplishments, men will seek for pleasure in variety, and faithless husbands will make faithless wives” (88). A footnote explains that these “personal accomplishments” include the smattering of languages, needlework, and music that Taylor describes in “Accomplishment.” Taylor is continuing the same thread as Wollstonecraft, but takes the strain of sexuality briefly touched upon by Wollstonecraft here, and makes it far more obvious, appearing to celebrate its faithless, boundless pleasure.

Taylor makes shrewd commentary on women’s education, figuring the relationship between education/accomplishment and women as an erotically charged relationship. I suggest that Taylor presents the education as a sexualizing/eroticizing force/process, whereby women are products of sexing, revealing an educated woman as akin to a sexed woman. Taylor’s poem also suggests that the process of education is akin to seduction, invoking quite vividly the erotically pedagogical relationship between knowledge/power, and teacher/student.

Three stanzas (4, 6, and 7) in “Accomplishment” reveal Taylor’s sexual descriptions of education:

There glows a bright pattern (a spring or a spot)  
‘Twixt clusters of roses full-blown and red hot;

Here magnified tulips divided in three,  
Alternately shaded with sections of tree.

.....

'Tis thus Education (so call'd in our schools)  
With costly materials, and capital tools,  
Sits down to her work, and at last she produces,  
Exactly the job that her customer chooses.

See French and Italian spread out on her lap;  
Then Dancing springs up, and skips into a gap;  
Next Drawing and all its varieties come,  
Sew'd down in their place by her finger and thumb. (13-28)

Stanza four continues to describe the “patchwork,” although I argue that it rather naughtily describes aroused female genitalia: “roses full-blown and red hot” (18). The description of “magnified tulips divided in three” (19) intimately positions the reader, as if she were close enough (lips-to-lips) to see; closing the gap between cunning linguistics and cunninglingus. Finally, if the blown roses and spread tulips didn't evoke vaginas, as they did for Georgia O'Keefe, the last detail, “shaded with sections of tree” (20), surely confirms our fantasy. As hot and full-blown as this reading is of stanza five, to delve a little deeper we might look more closely at the opening of the stanza: “'Twixt clusters of roses” (17). Clusters, roses twixt. What comes, then, is an orgiastic homoerotic presentation of the process of educating women, of the sexual nature and energy within the closed circuit (separate sphere) of women's education, or educated groups.

Wollstonecraft is right that accomplishments could lead to “faithless wives,” and perhaps even intimates that this faithlessness will come within a cloistered erotic economy wherever women are alone together. Wollstonecraft notes that in “nurseries,” “boarding-schools” (234), and “convents” (236), “many girls have learned very nasty tricks [...] women are in general too familiar with each other, which leads to that gross degree of familiarity that so frequently renders the marriage state unhappy” (234). Wollstonecraft doesn’t explain what it is that renders what precise part of the “marriage state” unhappy, but her prolonged hang-up on this issue is quite revealing. It seems that it has part to do with a specific part – though she certainly doesn’t reveal what exact part it is either: “How can *delicate* women obtrude on notice that part of the animal economy, which is so very disgusting?” (235). We might speculate that this “animal economy” is the vagina/anus – given their proximity to defecation and to the ground. Still, as obtuse as Wollstonecraft is, she is just as persistent. It certainly seems that Wollstonecraft has bedroom eyes, admitting perhaps to her own participation in prior lesbian bedchamber antics: “I cannot recollect, without indignation, the jokes and hoyden tricks which knots of young women indulged themselves in” (236) [...] “And what nasty indecent tricks do they not also learn from each other, when a number of them pig together in the same bedchamber” (282). Wollstonecraft appears to know something about bedchamber debaucheries, which she describes, despite pledging her disgust, with a sadomasochistic rhetoric: “knots” of young women indulging in licentious lesbianism while “pigging” together.



Throughout “Accomplishment” we move onto different planes of voyeurism. This subterranean sexing begins in stanza four where we see the female body described, and progresses to stanza seven, where we watch the female body being sexed up. Stanza seven scintillatingly progresses in its sexual description of the scene of education, going layer under layer with each line: “spread out on her lap” (25); “skips into a gap” (26); “its varieties come [...] by her finger and thumb” (27-8). Self-mastery in terms of education also figures/fingers as masturbation: coming by finger and thumb – although it isn’t limited to masturbation here: coming by “her” touch is also suggestive of another woman, reinforcing the difficulty in determining who is touching (which “her”) from the outside of this erotic economy. Augmenting this suggestive poem is Taylor’s use of the word “customer” (24), which connects education to prostitution. Considering who might be the customer Taylor speaks of here leads us to consider a husband figure. Seeing the customer/husband relation calls to mind again Wollstonecraft’s initial warning that “faithless husbands will make faithless wives” (88).

Some may be quick to charge the connection between sex and education as evidence of misogyny, of the puppeting of women by men by virtue of a patchwork education chosen by men. However, I would argue that as Taylor depicts the relationship, it would be a mistake to think that men are behind the sexing of the young lady. In this poem, women motivate the sexual pedagogy towards other women.

There are some similarities between Taylor and Shelley Jackson; both women writers work explicitly with the “patchwork” (Taylor in “Accomplishment” and Jackson in

Patchwork Girl) sharing as well an interest in children's stories. It isn't impossible to imagine Jackson drawing upon Taylor as a source of inspiration. As stanza seven in "Accomplishment" reveals, Taylor is able to make subjects (French, Italian, Dancing, Drawing) come to a surreal life, embodying a technique not unlike magic realism; a technique that Jackson revels in throughout her short stories Melancholy of Anatomy, where individual body parts come to life independent of the larger body. Before I stray too far into Shelley Jackson, there is another important aspect of the "patchwork" that hasn't yet been addressed, and yet is necessary in bringing us back to the weaver/ruler.

In "Accomplishment" Taylor relentlessly works to establish the patchwork quality of the woman's education through her rhetoric: "drapery" (9); "patchwork" (10); "pattern" (11); "labour of years" (17); "sew'd down" (28); "fanciful robes" (29); "sewn into shape" (32); "portions and patches" (35); "stitch'd up together" (36). Clearly then, women's accomplishments and education are a sort of patchwork.

Taylor uses patchwork as an alternative/opposition to artwork. Taylor stresses the troubled relationship between woman and frame, as evidenced through the inability of representing the crisis of the woman by a single image, at least as one that can be easily framed. Earlier in "Accomplishment," Taylor specifically mentions Claude Gellée ("paint like a Claude" (6)), which, as the footnote explains, represents

Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), professional name Claude Gellée, frequently shortened to Claude, French landscape painter famed for his depictions of

idealized classical Italian landscapes, the painter of “the beautiful” in landscape.

(Mellor 841)

F.V. Barry’s interpretation of Taylor’s poetry involves seeing her poem as picture:

“[Taylor’s] conventional pictures – “Morning,” “Evening,” and the rest, framed to fit chosen spaces on the Nursery wall – have a light and colour of their own” (xii). Reading Taylor’s “Accomplishment” this way is counterintuitive to its meaning, which hinges upon not being framed. Despite some similarities between male and female handiwork, including some of the rhetoric and terminology, there is a fundamental difference which distinctly separates the two; the frame. So, again, we can see how the frame figures in a variety of contexts. There is the weaver’s frame, and the frame of the artwork. Just as the Luddites rail against the mechanized frames, Taylor similarly rails against the frames that define and delimit meaning, such as artwork.

If the aim of conventional portraiture is to express some aspect of the inner life of the individual through the external signs of the body, as Claude does with landscapes, or as Keats does with the Grecian Urn, then the portrait of the woman presented in “Accomplishment” expresses the difficulty in framing the subject(s) of female education.

Patchwork is not art, as Taylor makes clear in stanza five:

But when all is finish’d, this labour of years,  
A mass unharmonious, unmeaning appears;  
‘Tis showy, but void of intelligent grace;  
It is not a landscape, it is not a face. (17-20)

Here, I argue, the frame makes the difference. Works done by women are accomplishments not art, done in their laps, not to be hung in a gallery or a museum. Taylor's deliberate reference to Claude Gellée, known for being the professional painter of "the beautiful" is particularly striking. At work here are issues of class: professional handiwork versus private handiwork, as well as issues of gender: women's handiwork is largely deemed as accomplishments (still private sphere) rather than part of the discourse of artwork. Taylor's stinging rhetoric in describing women's work as "unmeaning," is powerful. It seems to me to be a direct confrontation of how meaning is ascribed, such as 'the beautiful' as belonging to whatever Claude decides, saying that women can only expect, even after many laborious years, to produce "unmeaning," something "showy, but void of intelligent grace" (18-9).

Women's work then is in a troubled position. Lacking the defining frame, the definitive frame of the art work, women's work even lacks the ability to participate in the discourse. And yet, without the frame, women's work is free from the confining space of the frame. There is also the possibility that being "not a landscape...not a face" (20) is suggestive of staying in motion. Continual movement would resist the static nature of being framed, perhaps as another means of resisting the frame. This connects nicely with the Luddites, who manage to resist the mechanized frames while simultaneously resisting arrest.

This unruliness complements the inner "unmeaning" of, as Taylor so aptly calls, women's handiwork (whether it is sewing, knitting, or writing), as both run resistance to the 'masterpiece' mentality, the notion of the untouchable transcendent text, a desire

found infamously in painters such as Claude, and male poets such as Keats. Taylor's writing suggests that the quest for a 'masterpiece' is an untenable position for women. Then there is perhaps the sense that "patchwork" itself takes on another meaning here; an idiom for the all-female physical terrain, homoerotic environment, "[a]lternately shaded with sections of tree" (16). But, if their handiwork is devoid of "intelligible grace," it is made up for with great orgiastic sex – trading brush for bush. If women cannot break into the sphere of 'art,' men can similarly not penetrate the closed confines of women's "patchwork."

The angle of "Accomplishment" places the reader in a different relationship to the work than that traditionally imposed by canonical literature. If the conventional approach for reading such literature is to stand back, almost reverentially as one would in a gallery, in a manner that parallels the way in which many male poets wrote (Keats to the Urn), the work of many women writers during this period invites the reader to approach, touch, and be involved in the process of representation by the act of turning the pages, and peeking under the layers. This runs against the grain of writers such as Keats, for whom in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" the masterpiece is untouchable and motionless:

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy  
bliss. (16-19)

Just as the masterpiece is untouchable, the characters of the masterpiece are also unable to touch. Here, Keats presents the masterpiece and sex as elusive. Despite the fact that the

urn is not framed like a painting, it is framed in the sense that it is a still-life, its motion captured, and identified as being untouchable. This restraint, respect for the dividing line, is treated in a markedly different way in women's poetry. In "Accomplishment" Taylor invitingly brings the reader voyeuristically into sexual relationship with the education of a young woman. Taylor asks her reader to see the subtext, the layers under layers, rather than stand back behind the rope or glass or look at it like a painting. Gone is the purity of the moment, the safe distance between text and reader. Furthermore, as a queer female reader, the parameters of the text and its homoerotic subtexts spill over the edges of the text in a way that blurs my ability to stand back and maintain any critical distance between the poem and myself.

Taylor's female subject is touchable, to a selective audience, and yet does not bear the sterility of the off-limits artwork. Unlike her male counterparts, she does not lose the physical/sexual being of the body, or turn the body into a 'standing-reserve' of patches. Clearly showing depth with a clever and coy rhetoric of "unmeaning," Taylor retains the scrawling sexuality of women, the presence of female physicality and of its eroticism rather than simply see it as 'standing-reserve' for sloppy secondary education, or as a baby-making machine. Examining the woman only as a patchwork is to accept the framework, and allow the patchwork to stand metonymically for the woman, all the while ignoring the excessive sexuality.

In the diverse gamut of eighteenth century signatures, events, and contexts, it is revealed that people along class and gender lines are working through certain problems of textual

and iconographic representation. And yet, as different in subject and in form as they all are from one another, there remains a continuous thread, the obsessive repetition of the image of worker and his/her relation to the frame.

### CHAPTER 3: Patchwork, Patchwriting, Patchwiring

*The screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent.  
[...] and in the darkening and awful expanse of screen  
something has kept on, a film we have not learned to  
see...it is now a closeup of the face, a face we all know –  
[...] at this dark and silent frame - Pynchon 887*

As the mechanized frames of the eighteenth-century initiated this struggle between worker and frame and became the early touchstone for writer/frame engagements with textuality, a parallel phenomenon occurs in the late twentieth century between worker and computerized frame. Now, new issues regarding textuality and narrative arise from the hypertext framework. And, interestingly enough, just as the work produced by the mechanized frames in the Romantic period was called ‘spider-work’, the same description applies to the very structure and functionality of hypertext, and general computer rhetoric (the web, the Net, links, threads).

In fact, within the discussions surrounding electronic writing, we see the contentious patchwork explicitly resurface as “patchwriting.” As Bill Marsh explains, patchwriting is a form of plagiarism that can be traced back to Montaigne “who identified ‘patchwork’ as a weaker form of rhetorical invention made better by recourse to a poetics of literary transmutation” (113). According to Marsh, the contemporary practice of patchwriting describes the practice whereby the source text is copied, cut/up, rearranged, passages deleted and synonyms plugged in (113). Kathy Acker is one infamous patchwriter whose



influence finds traces in Shelley Jackson, who gives patchwriting added meaning in her experimental hypertexts.

Bridging the gap between Romanticism and postmodernism's engagement with the patchwork is Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl, a text owing a lot to Shelley's Frankenstein, which reveals another explicit engagement with the patchwork and the frame. In Shelley's text, Frankenstein frequently refers to the body itself as a frame:

to prepare a frame [...] with all its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins [...] I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. (81-2)

If the relation of patchwork to frame takes on a monstrous quality in Shelley's text— the patchwork is monstrous, with emphasis on its abjectness, evidenced in how the monster is made; stitched together from variegated body parts, laid out and pinned down to its framework— then in Jackson's hypertextual reworking, it is monstrous but in an ugly way; in the way that the body on the table has faded, even disappeared, and the focus of what is left are the various pins on the table. Reading Jackson's hypertext we see through what is left of the body, only to play connect the dots. Jackson glorifies the framework, pushing the body into/ under the table so that we might get a better look at the pins. This is a gesture of fetishizing technology, the truest sense of death denial – bringing back the dead female creature from the bottom of the sea only to preserve/drown it again in the deep labyrinth of code, this time only further shattering it: a technique akin to deliberately fraying the fibres of a rope.

Another interpretation of the rage against the patchwork comes from cultural anthropologist, Ernest Becker, who suggests that embedded within the desire to deny our finitude is the desire to deny our creatureliness. Following Kierkegaard, Becker insists that “[t]he creatureliness is the terror” (87). This fear of death, and of lack of specialness, leads to what Marcel O’Gorman calls “heroic projects” (“Death By Computer” 17). It is not a stretch to see Shelley Jackson’s hypertext, Patchwork Girl, as a Beckerian heroic project. Its extremely positive critical reception from a diverse array of sources reinforces Jackson’s and her text’s legitimacy as a groundbreaking, or rather gravebreaking, example of hypertext fiction. Doyens of the postmodern literary avant-garde, Robert Coover, and hypertext theorists, George Landow, proudly flaunt Jackson’s contribution to experimental postmodern (e)literature, calling it “serious hypertext,” and “a true paradigmatic work of the era” (Eastgate). For its return to the crime scene, Patchwork Girl is championed by cyberfeminists for offering a “modem of one’s own” – to quote Jodey Castricano.

Jackson’s text also holds its own in its ability to persevere. Twelve years since its publication, the main page of the Eastgate Systems website still touts it as its “best-selling title.” Jackson’s project has come to embody a certain Promethianism – aside from the fact that it is bleedingly suggested by the subtitles of both Frankenstein; “A Modern Prometheus,” and Patchwork Girl “A Modern Monster.”

Promethian projects, or perhaps self-described monstrous projects, such as Jackson’s hypertext, prompt Becker to warn that the driving force behind such projects, namely the

terror over our finitude, leads to “a defiant Promethianism that is basically innocuous: the confident power that can catapult man to the moon and free him somewhat of his complete dependence and confinement on earth” (85). Frankenstein and its various offspring always already serve as Promethean heroes, and vice versa. Heroic projects, like getting man on the moon, or preserving bodies in code or cryogenetic deep freeze, can also take on what Becker calls “the ugly side of this Promethianism [...] the empty-headed immersion in the delights of technics” (85).

While it is undoubtedly worthwhile to examine Jackson’s “delights of technics,” particularly in terms of her techniques – given the appropriateness of hypertext to her project of speaking to/with theory, theoretical figures, and even on a larger scale, of aesthetic parallels between the periods she straddles, namely postmodernism and Romanticism – most of the existing criticism surrounding the Patchwork Girl already overstresses the importance of its hypertext structure.

The existing body of Jackson criticism enacts Becker’s ugly Promethianism, a kind of genetic essentialism; of reducing and worshipping Patchwork Girl on the grounds of its molecular genetic code. By doing so, we are privileging a very reductive reading; like visiting a website and reading/looking at it for its source code, oohing and ahing over the hotlinks. Maybe there are some who enjoy reading code, but that kind of reading/looking is different than a deeper reading/looking. As Heidegger suggests, “[s]o long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain held fast in the will to master it. We press on past the essence of technology” (32). Focusing on the

technological apparatus, then, causes us to miss the ‘essence’ of a ‘thing’ (Heidegger’s word), or the impact of art. Friedrich Kittler, following Heidegger, suggests more poetically that “[t]he soul becomes a neurophysiological apparatus only when the end of literature draws near” (130). What Kittler suggests here is the danger we place ourselves in when we no longer see the ‘essence’ in art, or even art or literature at all. The danger of disembodiment threatens our body/mind connection when our art/technis connection is threatened. Thus, following and modifying Becker’s haunting warning of the overproduction of truths, we should be weary of the overproduction of technics.

And yet, we should also be weary of losing praxis. Becker himself overlooks the ugly side of an *anti*-Promethianism, in what I see as the manifestation of a virulent anti-technology anti-aestheticism, particularly within the humanities. Slightly biting the hand that feeds me, a quick survey of faculty webpages and course-sites, suggests that English professors often dismiss even basic aesthetic principles of webdesign. One surprising example of this is Gregory Ulmer, teletheorist and *electracian* par excellence, whose official website is strangely stagnant – an adjective otherwise completely antithetical to his critical thought! Without addressing the synthesis between art and techne, and by obstinately rejecting design aesthetics, intellectuals such as Ulmer are inevitably bringing their own theories into their own sort of finitude. When it comes to all matters of electronic literacy, or ‘electracy’ as Ulmer calls it, there appears to either be the complete embracing of technis, or none at all; content at the cost of theory, or theory at the cost of content. Ultimately we are content with neither.

Further exacerbating the art/techne dualist divide is what Hubert Dreyfus calls, in referring to the Internet, the “flattening effect.” As Dreyfus explains it, “[t]he problem is that, as far as meaning is concerned, all hyperlinks are alike” (12). This leads to the flattening out of meaning. Although Dreyfus is referring to the Internet, his discussion of hyperlinks is particularly transferable to discussions of hypertext. I recognize Jackson’s linked structure as a good gesture, a performance of post-structuralist thinking, but there is a difference in looking and reading, and the sheer propensity of links, and the nature of how we otherwise always already treat links – the idea of clicking through – foregrounds the viewer/reader’s experience of Patchwork Girl. Thus, while in many ways Jackson is here embodying, actually putting theory into practice, its effectiveness, or impact is still beyond our grasp, perhaps largely due to the framework that its entirety hinges on. As Peters laments,

[i]f only the signifying vehicles would vanish so that we could see into each other’s hearts and minds, genuine communication would be possible. If only we were angels, with transparent bodies and transparent thoughts. (qtd. in O’Gorman 13)

In many ways, if only Jackson’s hypertext were not a hypertext; as Hayles notes, “the system generating a reality is shown to be part of the reality it makes [...] reflexivity has subversive effects because it confuses and entangles the boundaries we impose on the world in order to make sense of that world” (8-9). The closed system Hayles describes, that is indicative of our recording technologies today, complements Dreyfus’ experience of disembodied space on/in the Net. As Dreyfus notes, “[i]n cyberspace, then, without our embodied ability to grasp meaning, relevance slips through our non-existent fingers”

(26). Of course, this is quite possibly Jackson's point; demonstrating, in practice again, post-structural theory's fondness towards decentering, subverting, and deprivileging texts of their authority. Nevertheless, the powerful impact it could have on us is lost, at least now, when the number of websites has grown exponentially, and the number of hyperlinks is at apocalyptic proportions. It is not because it is a melting-pot of text from Derrida, Mary Shelley, etc. It is because we only have to look rather than read, distractedly clicking through them, that any larger importance or effect the text is to have on me is lost. What is experienced is, perhaps, some sense of a Heideggerian "boredom," which Giorgio Agamben describes as when "we are riveted and delivered over to what bores us" (64). And, if the answer to this is that this is a self-reflexive technique, to call attention to the way in which we confront hypertext, or, that it means nothing at all, then its fate is sealed, and is in fact guilty of all the postmodern perversities, of Kierkegaardian coffee-housing, as well as Becker's charge of "ugly Promethianism." This is the danger I envision as a result of playing with technics; that we have closed ourselves in within a system; that we will no longer be able to speak to/with, or of the 'essence' of a text, as a result of how completely enframed it is by its form, which we have made to be both a process and a product, and yet, can no longer separate the two.

There is a certain irony in applying the best secular Ur-text of immortality, the myth of Prometheus, to a technology that will be perhaps outdated before even fully developed. Jackson's hypertext cannot compare to the cinematic progenies of the Prometheus myth which continue to fill theatre seats, the most fundamental difference being the film's embodied presence of the human. While Jackson's text does have images, they are highly

abstracted, black and white sketches, fragments, most offensively without any sense of messy fluids. To take Sidney Perkowitz slightly out of context: “regardless of what is going on inside an artificial being [...] the merest hint of humanlike action or appearance deeply engages us” (2). If the images were more iconic to the bodies of our meat reality, we would at least be able to indulge in our postmodern fetish for ourselves, or just the same – the simulation of ourselves. The images theoretically offer Jackson an opportunity to launch another theoretical probe, such as the line of argument that Peters notes: “[e]lectronic media both supplement and transform the nineteenth-century culture of doppelgangers by duplicating and distributing indicia of human presence” (141). Unfortunately, Jackson’s images do not realize or even reach for their potential power.

Hayles’ description of her own project lends itself uncannily to what could be the ideal summation of Jackson’s hypertext: “This book is a rememory [...] putting back together parts that have lost touch with one another and reaching out toward a complexity too unruly to fit into disembodied ones and zeros” (13). This notion of parts being ‘too unruly’ to be embodied in a disembodied code should be the quality of the Patchwork Girl, as opposed to how it currently fits onto a thin CD-ROM, kept locked away in the bowels of the library archives. We should be critically skeptical of Jackson’s success, especially considering who has been prescribing it (George Landow, whose definition of hypertext trumps all others – Eastgate Systems, the site which has a hand in Jackson’s purse). If anything, Jackson’s potentially aggressive anti-establishment avant-garde narrative falls victim to new media; to the communicative systems and technologies built and bred on the sterilization and professionalization of disembodied information. Jackson

operates smoothly, according to code, even listing properly cited footnotes when she refers to Derrida – rather than playing sardonically, or dangerously cuntaminating. There are no bodily fluids for Jackson. Patchwork Girl ~~plays~~ operates nicely with others. Too nicely for my liking.

So while we may talk, indebted to Becker, about the “ugly side of Promethianism,” of progress for progress sake, we could similarly see Jackson’s text as praxis for theory’s sake. For, aside from hitting poststructural g-spots, such as the rhizome, fragment, schizoid, the hypertext certainly feels ugly. Perhaps all of us needed to shudder (again) first at its unfortunate level of aestheticism, then at the way in which we cannot recognize our own humanness anywhere within the text (unless perhaps we self-identify as a posthuman or cyborg), and finally in the sense that the hypertext technology, delivered no less on a CD-ROM that already looks antiquated, reveals – quite transparently – the falseness of our human desire of immortality. Investing energy into making something immortal is wasted, perhaps perversely so, given the short lifespan of the hypertext medium itself. Arguably, hypertext literature’s heyday has already come and gone with the mid-nineties. This investment in a medium that we might always already see as almost-living or almost-dead, any ‘creative, experimental’ work done using hypertext, ultimately seems to be the project of the last man. Following Francis Fukuyama’s notion of the ‘last man,’ using hypertext isn’t dangerous, and not very risky – since we encounter it in very banal ways, embedded in webpages that many of us stare at for the majority of our day. There is no real fear, no real risk, it is a very safe space – so much so it is uncomfortably reminiscent of the domestic sphere, especially when we consider how



in the name itself, Patchwork Girl, conjures engendered ideas of ‘women’s work’; sewing and quilting.

Interestingly, rather than expressing any sort of megalothymic pride for it, Jackson shies away, reminiscent of when Wiener looks “into the mirror of the cyborg but then withdraws,” afraid of the hideous boundary blurring (Hayles 108). Jackson even throws her authorship into question, during an address at MIT (“Stitch Bitch”). Rather than revel in her project as a work of great self-reflexivity, the reality of it suggests that it isn’t the future of writing, or even of her writing, nor is it the future of radicality simply due to its ‘new’ form(at).

In one sense Jackson is clearly aware of the finite body: in fact, it is a remembering (pun intended) of the dismembered female body from Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein. It is perhaps most obviously a return to the physical body that is at the core of the story. Yet, on closer inspection, the body is forgotten (again), at least in its fleshy, composite wholeness. The female body is presented in fragments; revived from the dead but refusing to be made into something ‘whole’ again – seemingly reveling in the postmodern affinity for the fragmented, schizoid identity.

It is possible that the first death the female creature died at the hands of Mary Shelley was far less violent than at the hands of Shelley Jackson. In Frankenstein the female creature is exposed and disposed all in the span of a few pages (189-196) and with little detail. Furthermore, most of the narrative space is given to Frankenstein’s psychological

struggle over whether or not to create the female creature rather than the description of the actual event. In fact, the dismemberment and disposal only consume a few scattered paragraphs:

I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like him, and, trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged.  
(191)

The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being [...] I accordingly put [the body parts] into a basket, with a great quantity of stones and laying them up, determined to throw them into the sea that very night.  
(194-5)

In fact, the way in which Frankenstein treats this body dump is strangely melancholic and peaceful, particularly in terms of what he does after he disposes of the body: “[I] cast my basket into the sea; listened to the gurgling sound as it sunk [...] stretched myself at the bottom of the boat [...] the murmur lulled me, and in a short time I slept soundly” (195). Frankenstein reveals here a strange closeness with the sea (typically gendered female) and the mutilated body; a strange closeness that he shares with other men of the time, such as male-midwives. One noted figure, William Hunter, straddles the border between male/female and life/death in his precarious position as male-midwife. The physiological/anatomical intimacy inherent from working within a women’s profession as well as on women’s bodies leaves Hunter queerly aligned with women, “open to insinuating remarks about hypocritical ‘men of feeling’” (Hunter qtd. in Cohen 389). Furthermore, Hunter’s work reveals that his involvement with women’s bodies is on the

condition of their death and dissection. This strange combination of the maternal and macabre that Hunter embodies is also shared by Frankenstein.

Jackson, contrary to Shelley, sadistically revives the female monster, which originally figured in only a few pages of Shelley's novel, only to splinter her liminal presence by a magnification of 200x. Jackson, in over 200 different lexias, disembodies the character further than ever before, into encyclopedic proportions of the molecular scale. The lexias range from a few pages long to a few sentences short, themselves a patchwork of words. And, let us not forget the violence inherent in the medium Jackson arms herself with – hypertext, an offshoot of the Net, is itself a technological storage medium with militaristic origins.

What is apparent here is the violence associated with framing technologies.

Compounding this calculated scientific magnification and splintering of identity into parts, and parts within parts, is the misgiving of dealing with code and not a body.

Whether it is genetic or programmatic, what is essential is that everything is enframed as code. And yet, if this is how we continue to interrogate this text – by only focusing on its frame – the question becomes whether the connective (t)issue at hand is not flesh but Flash, not DNA but HTML.

#### CHAPTER 4: *Helter Skelter*

Uninspired by seeing framework become frameworship, I need the body to reappear. Not just any body, but the human body, the fleshy, meat reality of the body. In order for us to let the framework fade, we confront the finite body and admit that we are (still) not disembodied uploaded-consciousnesses in machines.

I believe the most successful way of grounding the body involves the ground. The grave. Mud and shit. Our excremental signature. And to look to ground us, I see the writers of the Romantic period, specifically Blake as being engaged with finitude; their signatures already grounded in the body, a time when death and writing are engaged in tandem – this, as a solvent to the existing signature scholarship done primarily by Kamuf which incorrectly overlooks any context, physicality, or human factor/essence inherent in the signature. I posit that the future of theory demands a return to the body, and that it will be found using tropes and tripes from the Romantic period – a period that already shares much in common with the postmodern, but has the benefit of still believing in/touching the finite, fleshy body. I share this *revenant* with David Simpson who admits:

I am especially anxious to recover the historical foundation for Derrida in the writings of Rousseau – though I thereby risk the accusation of an outmoded concern for origins – because I want to ask some questions about his common *history* with Blake, and because I sense that this relation to the past is not much attended to those most active in employing his arguments in contemporary literary criticism. (13)

Simpson is right to feel anxious and to recognize the unpopularity of such an approach, but also to identify the limitation of this theory, and to push past it. Like Simpson, then, I return to the period and even to Blake, but rather than limit my argument to Blake and Derrida, I aim to flesh out a better *history* (also known as event and context) for the signature at large. I tether the signature to the body, using examples from the eighteenth-century as I think this is the period when authorship and the body are so closely engaged; a tethering which reinforces the finitude of the human and the humanness/finitude of the signature. This is a good starting place; this is where I will tie the first knot.

### *Pig Pen*

Blake is the eighteenth-century figure who must be included in the discussion of signatures, stitching, and shitting; who in his marginalia and in a marginal reading embodies all the concerns of this essay. Similar to Taylor who makes the distinction between patchwork and artwork, Blake makes the same point over a musing on his own signature.

Appended to his signature in William Upcott's autograph-album is an annotation.

Transcribed by David V. Erdman, in The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, the annotation to the autograph reads:

The above was written & the drawing annexed by the desire of Mr Leigh how far it is an Autograph is a Question I do not think an Artist can write an Autograph especially one who has Studied in the Florentine & Roman Schools as such an

one will Consider what he is doing but an Autograph as I understand it, is Writ  
helter skelter like a hog upon a rope or a Man who walks without Considering  
whether he shall run against a Post or a House or a Horse or a Man & I am apt to  
believe that what is done without meaning is very different from that which a Man  
Does with his Thought & Mind & ought not to be Calld by the Same Name. I  
consider the Autograph of Mr Cruikshank which very justly stands first in the  
Book & that Beautiful Specimen of Writing by Mr Comfield & my own; as  
standing [in] the same Predicament they are in some measure Works of Art & not  
of Nature or Chance [...]. (698)

Blake makes a distinction between different line works: art is pitted against the signature. As Blake says, “I do not think an Artist can write an Autograph,” because as an artist, “one will Consider what he is doing.” By figuratively describing the act of signing as “a hog upon a rope,” Blake evokes the rope as the thread; a sort of primitive, bestial handiwork. Despite the fact that Blake admits his own uncertainty over whether his signature is a work of art or work of nature or chance, it also sounds as if Blake would like to draw the line between art and the rest: “I am apt to believe that what is done without meaning is very different from that which a Man Does with his Thought & Mind & ought not to be Calld by the Same Name.”

The direction of Blake’s argument might seem to suggest that authorial intention makes the difference between work of art and work of nature/chance. However, this is clearly not the case considering how the line that is drawn with a hog and rope clashes with Blake’s famous description of the importance of the line: the “great and golden rule of

art” is “the more distinct, sharp and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art” (Catalogue 63). Thus, the line, rather than intention, determines the kind and value of handiwork, rather than intention being perfectly embodied in the distinct line.

In another sense, equating the signature with the rope also evokes the washing line, giving the imagery of the hog running around “helter skelter” with the rope the possibility of having run right out of any number of poems from Barbauld, perhaps “Washing-Day.” Blake’s hog-on-a-rope is also the line on which gender and class references hang, particularly in evoking the washing line with its charged feminine and rural connotations. Handwork again here is defined and delimited based on gender differences, just as it is for Taylor between women’s line work (patchwork) and men’s line work (“the beautiful” in art, painted lines); as well as class differences, the line of rope attached to the hog evoking the washing line of the rural scene, and sharp/wirey line evoking mechanical technological progress and privilege. While the line is a restraint to keep the pig from ruining things, it gets loose anyway – helter skelter!

Questionably, I am taking the hog too seriously, at the risk of getting hung up on the rope of the hog. Still...stele...

Blake’s evocation of the hog is not simply a trope. The hog, as a lecture by G.E. Bentley entitled “Freaks of Learning: Learned Pigs, Musical Hares, and the Romantics” reveals, is a popular and politicized figure for the Romantics. An announcement in the Daily Universal Reporter reveals the talents of the Learned Pig:

This entertaining and sagacious animal casts accounts by means of Typographical cards, in the same manner as a Printer composes, and by the same method sets down any capital or Surname, reckons the number of People present, tells by evoking on a Gentleman's Watch in company what is the Hour and Minutes; he likewise tells any Lady's Thoughts in company, and distinguishes all sorts of colours. (qtd. in Bentley 9)

This description of the learned pig reveals how the composition method of the printer is equated with that of the pig that pushes paper around on the ground: "by the same method sets down any capital or Surname." This suggests an actual historical event to contextualize Blake's comment about the signature as a hog on a rope. Perhaps it even implies motivation for why Blake chooses the pig: a reaction against being equated, even threatened, with the similar methodology of a pig. The pig pushing typographical cards in place is akin to printers pushing around moveable type, and their relationship to the name, of having to push it into place, is the same. Not only does the pig push, but it also digs. The pig, digging in the mud, is similar to Blake's engraving method, which involves hand drawing on copper, digging hard into the whole plates. Perhaps Blake is anxious about pigwork since like the pig he digs around in muck. He is not the only one; if we dig far enough into the mess, we find Burke also taking digs at the mass, characterizing them as pigs: "learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude" (97-8). Burke finds himself in the pigpen next to Rousseau. Mary Wollstonecraft, who, as I explained earlier, describes the trouble that comes from girls "pigging together," also smears Rousseau as a pig: "His ridiculous stories, which tend to



prove that girls are *naturally* attentive to their persons [...] should be selected with the anecdotes of the learned pig” (129).

As Bentley reveals, even Wordsworth weighed in on the pig. In a description of St. Bartholomew’s Fair from The Prelude (1805), Wordsworth reveals a rather poignant feature of the pig: the way in which it gestures at something beyond itself but also reminds us of our finitude:

All moveables of wonder, from all parts,  
Are here – Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs,  
The Horse of knowledge, and the learned Pig  
...  
All out-o’-the-way, far-fetched, perverted things,  
All freaks of nature, all Promethean thoughts  
Of man, his dullness, madness, and their feats  
All jumbled up together. (qtd. in Bentley 20)

That the pig is at once an emblem of man’s Promethean thoughts – dreams of immortality, of overcoming oneself – and “dulness” is striking. Though neither Wordsworth nor Bentley elaborates on these lines, the pig both fascinates us by being like us (engaging language) and simultaneously and crudely reminds us of our proximity to the ground, to our defecating bodies. The pig, more than any other animal, heightens this attraction/repulsion and anxiety as it is the animal most like us, learned and with the same-coloured skin, and yet the animal most commonly associated with the “dirty and disorderly” (Bentley 1). Both the pig and Promethean Frankenstein creature are freaks of

learning; freakish pupils, having the ability to outstrip the categories and expectations we give them. A pig pushing around letters and the creature as dead come back to life: it is a matter of being in-between life/death; they are in effect the “/” of such categories.

In fact, the pig and the Frankenstein creature intersect explicitly in Shelley’s Frankenstein, when the creature recounts taking refuge from “the barbarity of man” at the back of a cottage in a pigsty: “It was situated against the back of the cottage, and surrounded on the sides which were exposed by a pig-stye and a clear pool of water [...] all the light I enjoyed came through the stye” (133). Further intersection is in the invocation of the Learned Pig, emphasized when the creature starts to learn language (133-141). Ultimately, the creature is undeniably framed as an “animal,” as the freakishly precocious pig, taking refuge at the back of the house with the other animals, and is starkly contrasted with the educated man, Frankenstein, who takes “refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which [he] inhabited,” from the creature (86).

Bentley reveals that “these Learned Pigs [...] remind Mary Wollstonecraft of the masculine prejudice of the world, or at any rate of Rousseau” (25). Wollstonecraft should also be squealing at Burke, who makes some piggish digs at women and education: “a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order” (95). Pigs also remind Wordsworth of man’s Promethean thoughts and dullness, while for Coleridge, pigs are a reminder of “the waywardness of words and associations” (Bentley 26). The pig, here, is an emblem of Rousseau, of dreams of transcendence and of shit, and of difference in language. Consider also how Blake ties the signature to the pig, and Wollstonecraft ties

the pig to Rousseau, and Derrida and Kamuf tie the signature to Rousseau. It is all (hog)tied together.

Furthermore, there is the possibility that the rope of Blake's signing hog is not a rope at all, but a trail of excrement; a line of argument which could only further ground the relationship between writing, the signature, the body, and death.

To forage further into the matter at hand, inspired by Katherine Young's "brief discursus on sausages, and on feces, intestines, pigs, food, and phalluses" (111), which briefly traces the pig (and pork products) in Bakhtinian thought, I am certain to make my own trope on tripe – and I may as well since 2007 is the Year of the Pig (!)

First, to understand the status of the pig we have to recognize its unique status as food and feces. Young calls the pig an ambivalent animal, one who is "between categories, wild and tame, country and city, animal and man [...] It is the animal that eats feces and makes food" (112). It is this categorical liminality that makes the pig such an abomination. James Aho suggests that

[p]igs are an abomination, Douglas argues, not because they were known at the time they were outlawed to harbor parasites, nor because pork spoiled in hot climates before refrigeration was invented. Instead their uncleanliness arises from their being cloven-hoofed quadrupeds that do not chew cuds. (16)

Regardless of the exact origin, or the initial reason behind why we see pigs as dirty, the uncleanliness of pigs has to do with their iconic image, which is at once both in the pen

and in the pan. The transgression has less to do with hygiene, and more to do with the way in which it is in between categories.

Young enlists Bakhtin to help blend the shit with the sausage. Feces, as Bakhtin explains in Rabelais and His World, is an “*intermediate between earth and body*” (175). This “gay matter” (335) comes from a gray matter, the intestines. As Young notes,

Consider, then, intestines, that thin, tough, translucent tube which contains feces within the belly. Consider this same tubing, taken from the pig and stuffed with finely minced offal from the pig’s belly. (111)

Pig, then, is both feces and food, death and life. The winding intestines, encasing feces and then food, are both inside and outside bodies, reminding me here of Blake’s scrawling signature, and Becker’s description of humans as “mobile digestive systems [...] frantically gobbling up other living beings and leaving behind trails of fuming excrement” (qtd. in Aho 1-2).

The Beckerean vision of humans as mobile digestive systems offers another perspective to Blake’s work which is typically thought of as womb imagery. In The Four Zoas “the Daughters of Enitharmon weave the ovarium & the integument / In soft silk drawn from their own bowels in lascivious delight” (376). The reference to bowels, though usually interpreted as the womb, offers an alternative reading, one that sees this as an intestinal spinning, excremental weaving. Connolly also notes the intestinal imagery in Blake’s engravings: “Another anatomical feature Blake employs is the intestine. Clouds, worms, and chains of human bodies are portrayed in intestinal shapes” (48). Of course, Blake

recognizes his own proximity to excremental origins through his writing in the satiric verse “When Klopstock”: “If Blake could do this when he rose up from shite / What might he not do if he sat down to write” (31-2).

If Blake equates the signature with the hog, we might equate Blake with the spider. To stretch the many different hands of Blake (different from the many different Blakes), we can see how Blake with a hand in many mediums is analogous to a multi-limb creature; the spider. I choose the spider, specifically, since it brings together both the mechanization (Luddite problem) and Blake’s frequent imagery of the web, loom, and weaver. Hilton traces this spider-work throughout Blake’s texts, overlooking the event and context that complement it: the revolt of the Luddites and Byron’s speech about it. “Spider work,” as Byron details, is the weaver’s name for the shoddy work produced by the mechanized frames: “Yet it is to be observed, that the work thus executed was inferior in quality; not marketable at home, and merely hurried over with a view to exportation. It was called, in the cant of the trade, by the name of ‘Spider Work’” (885). First calling Blake a pig, and now a spider – this playful tracing complements Blake’s own play with textuality, the play that Blake consciously engages in between the textual and the textile. As Hilton notes, “[r]eferences to ‘weaving’ and its enabling technology of the ‘loom’, however, do occur with considerable frequency in Blake, usage whose significance comes in the etymological derivation of ‘text’ from Latin *texere*, ‘to weave’” (“Play” 85). The play between writing and weaving, between text and textile not only converges in the figure of the spider, but also in the figure of Blake’s signature – and the many figures (many Blakes) it suggests exist. As Hilton, citing Essick, notes:

A 'Blake' who reports that he 'has died Several times Since' his birth hints at the existence of multiple identities, and, in any event, is only 'actually existing in this world now in the various, recalcitrant, and material body of manufactured objects he had a role in producing. (86)

The evocation of "multiple identities" is further augmented by Jason Snart, who, in a study of Blake's marginalia, suggests a "more general concern that may emerge as study of the marginalia continues is whether documents signed by 'William Blake' are indeed by the poet, painter, and engraver, William Blake" (170). Snart cites the nonspecific signature, "WB," appended to the Milton volume as troubling, and also quotes G.E. Bentley who in "A Collection of Prosaic William Blakes" admits that "during the poet's lifetime, from 1757 to 1827, London seems to have been teeming with men named William Blake" (qtd. in Snart 170).

Most interesting to the relationship between multiple identities and the signature, however, is Snart's examination of a letter by a William Blake:

[It] is a letter written by 'William Blake,' though not William Blake, the poet and engraver. The script itself is unlike the poet Blake's, though the autograph is enough like Blake's that, taken alone, it might be confused for the poet's. (170)

Here, then, the complex nature of the signature becomes apparent, as do the difficulties in criticism. Snart admits, however, the impossibility of conducting handwriting analysis as a means of determining 'the' canonical William Blake: "Blake worked in a diverse array of contexts, each perhaps eliciting a different hand" (170). While this may be a sufficient explanation, another explanation comes from the basic tenets of signature theory; that the

signature is always, in a sense, torn from the name and the signer, involved in a relationship with “a different hand.” Now, aware of the multiple William Blakes (“will the real William Blake please stand up?”), the name William Blake, and the signature attached, becomes the site and sign of a problem – just as it does with Rousseau. While Snart gives the most recent analysis of Blake’s marginalia, he surprisingly fails to mention Blake’s signature in Upcott’s album, or Blake’s copy of A Political and Satirical History of the Years 1756 and 1757, which has on its title-page multiple signatures of a ‘William Blake’ (Hamlyn 108).

CHAPTER 5: *Urizen: Fi(b)re in the (w)hole!*

To interrupt my interruption of Kamuf, another overlooked sense of “weaver” is the Air Force slang: “A pilot (or aircraft) pursuing a devious course” (OED). This is the sense in which I am here a weaver. Scholasta-Kamikaze!

Hisao Ishizuka, in an essay entitled “Enlightening the Fibre-Woven Body: William Blake and Eighteenth-Century Fibre Medicine,” uses the fibre instead of the nerve to explain the proliferation of “fibre-based bodies” (72) within William Blake’s poetry. Ishizuka’s analysis of both textual and visual instances of entwined bodies, figures with threads, roots, tendrils, webs, and chains, is brilliantly spun, all the while simultaneously tracing the fibre throughout Enlightenment medicine. To *steel* a little of Ishizuka’s thunder... while Ishizuka nearly exhausts the etymology of ‘fibre’ in terms of its relation and occurrences within botanical and medical discourses, there is still one sense that is overlooked; the sense that most concretely connects it to Blake’s metalwork:

“fibre, *n., A.c.*” A structure characteristic of wrought metal in which there is a directional alignment or elongation of crystals or inclusions. (OED)

I refer to both concrete and steelwork within the same sentence. The two are not so dissimilar; especially if we consider steelwork as *stelework*, *stela* being, as Ulmer explains,



not only an upright stone slab, bearing an inscription or design, serving as a monument or marker, but also the central cylinder or cylinders of vascular and related tissue in the stem, root, leaf, and so on of higher plants. (Applied Grammatology 19)

This, then, bridges the stitch and the stone.

Just as Blake reveals the embodiment of fibre in his images and texts, I would add that the entire text/plate, even Blake's entire oeuvre itself is also the embodiment of fibre. In this way then, fibre is not only inextricable from the fabric on a frame, from the weavers, from our understanding of the human body (as Ishizuka reveals fibre-theory to be one way in which we understood physical embodiment) the paper used for printing, but it is also inextricable from the chemical structure of metal; the framework of the Luddites as well as copper metal plates of Blake. The fibre stitches everything up.

Fibre also lets everything go. Fibre not only is involved in the body's composition, but also in its decomposition and excremental condition. Fibre invokes excremental product(ion)s, which are located in the buttock. Aho explains that "[a]mong the most telling organs in the anatomy of the lived-body are its entry and exit points, its orifices" (2). Aho refers to James Brain and Ernest Becker, who reduce our feelings of dread to one single factor, death. As Aho notes,

[o]ut of terror of their own mortality, human beings devise legends about body openings and invent ceremonies to police their display and effusions. [...] Tears are farthest from death, hence the least revolting and the least subject to

regulation. Next in rank come hair, nails, and sweat, followed by spit, nasal discharge, and vomit. Urine and scat are nearest to death. (7)

Aho limits himself to the religio-historical context of orifice-anxiety, and as Connolly notes, overlooks other bodily fluids: blood, mucous, semen, and milk – those which are feminine and/or sexual (Personal Correspondence). Still, despite these oversights, Aho's fundamental premise that we *are* bodies rather than simply *have* bodies, and that we move through our worlds “carnally” is applicable to any context.

It is the orifice of the anus, and its corresponding anxiety that I will focus on for the remainder of this section, specifically focusing on Blake's The Book of Urizen. Just as Aho says about our humanness, “[w]e move through our worlds carnally, through handshakes, smiles, couplings, and sleep; tactically adorning, perfuming, and veiling certain body parts” (1), we might say the same about Blakean criticism. A quick survey determines the overwhelming number of critics discussing the flowers, vegetation, and organicism; or, the other extreme, critics are content to disconnect from the physicality of Blake by enframing him in sterile hypertext databases. Either the object is missing from the body, thereby missing the human, or the body is missing, victim of the database transformed into a file extension, JPEG, GIF – a kind of Krokerian data trash.

Save Connolly's William Blake and the Body there appears to be a general desire in Blakean scholarship to apply flowery perfume to the dirty parts (dirty plates), or, look *through* the body rather than actually *at* it – the body in the sense of how the body as

Blake presents it, and the body of Blake, as is in his corpus of writing. The dirty parts/plates I refer to here are in Urizen.

William Blake is a great place to start talking about being confronted with the signature and the finite body: numerous plates in Milton and The Book of Urizen visually place buttocks, or buttocks-shaped stones, in the center of the plate, bringing together the reader's eyes and the anus; the orifice that so uncomfortably signals our finitude.

In a strange little chapter of Literal Imagination, consisting of only nine pages, Nelson Hilton cautiously, briefly, enters and withdraws from the grave. Here, Hilton pauses on Blake's figurations of the grave in The Book of Urizen and Milton. Like a good deconstructionist, Hilton cites the etymology of the word "grave," and unearths that "[t]he history of 'grave' manifests unconscious associations by which engraving may be perceived as digging and burying as much as sculpting" (19). Barbara Stafford goes further, revealing the connection "between the etching process and the exploration of hidden physical or material topographies. Important, too, was the entire panoply of probing instruments, chemicals, heat and smoke, revealing and concealing grounds" (70). These *probing instruments* involved in the engraving process amplify the sexuality inherent in the relationship between Blake, his engraved bodies, and even his reading bodies.

Having done a little digging of my own, it should be noted that Hilton chooses the two meatiest books of Blake that have the most prominent and bulging buttocks. Although

Hilton's chapter is only nine pages, these are arguably the most interesting of the entire book, taking a sexual reading deep. Hilton's premise, like that of the critics he cites, is that the grave figures sexually, metaphorically, for the vagina. Hilton notes, "[t]he engraved line is hollow until filled with the body of ink [...] The hollowness of the grave is also that of the womb, waiting to be filled" (22). The equation of the grave with the vagina is not convincing, and Hilton leaves textual traces that suggest we have good reason not to believe what he says.

Hilton argues that "*Milton* similarly opens with its protagonist entering the dark ground" (23). Although this "dark ground" may be a tomb, womb, cave or grave, as Hilton suggests, I argue that this "dark ground" may also be a rectum. This reading, confronts – and is confronted by – Milton's tight buttocks; in fact, it is at the very center of the plate – just like the center of The Book of Urizen. Visually and critically, then, we are forced to face it. And so, after having faced the butt, how can we say this reading speaks of the vagina? Clearly, if anything, the "literal imagination" of Blake is the literal crack in the image, the buttocks. To do so would be to speak of the reader's (selective) blindness.

Hilton isn't the only one to gloss over the buttocks; Thomas Vogler and Molly Anne Rothenberg only address – more like dress up – the butt crack as a metaphor for this or that. This seems to be a pervasive fear of the perverse: of being sucked into the crack, of coming near the dirty orifice (in all the senses), of critical contamination (no 'serious' Blakean scholars want to cut their teeth on such shit).

Vogler, in “Re:Naming *MIL/TON*,” opens with an image of the title page to Milton with the image of Milton’s backside. And while the essay addresses the “/” cleft in the title, Vogler overlooks the obvious graphically similar “/” cleft of Milton’s butt crack. And, as Vogler breaks down the different meanings and connotations of the words “breach,” “chasm,” and “cracks” (153), he astonishingly manages to look the other way and miss their connection to the literal “crack” on Milton’s body. If Vogler’s essay is about the crack, about the breach, it should be noted that Vogler actually manages to avoid breaching the crack; he has in effect, not taken the text as far, as deep, as it should have gone.

Nonetheless, the overlooked buttocks motif is most disappointing in Rothenberg, whose book, Rethinking Blake’s Textuality, is supposed to be a ‘rethinking’ of Unnam’d Forms; it fails to push the figures of depth deep enough. It is in her chapter entitled “Epistemological Crisis and the Phenomenalistic Subject” where Rothenberg has the most potential for getting into the crack in the way she examines the depth and shadows of Blake’s figures. While Rothenberg examines Jerusalem, her analysis of the figure on Plate 97 could easily be of any of Blake’s muscular figures. Examining lunar crescents and optic rays, Rothenberg’s reading into this crack is “if the figure could be viewed in its bow configuration, the odd lines marking the left back and buttock of the figure might stand out as a female head and torso” (94). Interestingly, then, the buttocks are never critically examined as themselves, always as something else – or as Rothenberg reveals by making out a woman’s head and torso, even *someone* else entirely. As Connolly suggests, Rothenberg would rather make the female an arse than face the arse, going to

unlikely lengths to make it heterosexual, all to avoid Blake's butt fascination (Personal Communication).

Perhaps the most ambiguous butt belongs to the one with a similarly ambiguous name: Urizen. Of Urizen's rock-hard buttocks, Hilton sees "a double headstone [...] the graven tablets of the law" (25). To Hilton's credit, he does admit that "Urizen and his reader are equally caught in his grave condition" (25). Recognizing this mutual implication echoes Connolly who suggests that Blake's books "having something to do with getting through to an unreceptive audience [...] are more likely to swallow up their readers" (2). Connolly's invocation of being "swallowed" speaks eloquently to the permeable body boundaries, as well as to the permeability between the grave/rectum, reader/rectum. Being "swallowed" is clearly erotically charged, and complements Hilton's consideration of the vortex which he sees bodily in terms of genitals.

### *Orifice Hours*

Hilton's reading reveals a fear of the orifice, which is a surprising phobia for a Blakean, since as Connolly notes, "Blake's books are preoccupied with the orifices of the body" (3-4). Furthermore, Connolly finds Blake's books themselves to be orifices that (threaten to) suck the reader in, also suggesting that Blake "likens entering his text to entering a human body" (4). Connolly, perhaps coyly, doesn't specify, or limit herself by doing so, specifically which orifices are involved. Connolly notes that "Blake's books are the opposite of Ezekiel's scroll: they are more likely to swallow up their readers" (2).

Interestingly, if Blake's images swallow their readers it isn't the mouth doing the swallowing; oftentimes the buttocks are presented at eye-level (where the face should be) – for example, Urizen's body appears upside-down, Milton's butt is in the middle of the title page – leaving the anus to do the swallowing; here, the anus is the vortex.

Hilton avoids swallowing (t)his, revealing himself to be a conservative reader, and this investigation into the cleft and crack of Milton ultimately untouched. Connolly warns that “[a] reader unwilling to fill in the blanks, to participate, to take that risk of emotional investment in the text, may be frustrated and repulsed by the demands and the dangers imposed by the orifices of the illuminated books” (12). It is even more than simply the risk of an emotional investment; it is also the risk of performing a queer reading which admits one's contemplation of queer sex acts, producing a text that might threaten to contaminate the grounds of other texts. What Hilton tries in vain to avoid is the orifice, and yet to deal with any of Blake's texts is always already to be dealing with the orifice. Blake, then, is orificial. We should embrace the orifice, swallowing Blake as he swallows us.

Connolly identifies skin as an orifice that is enterable, a point that plays out nicely with my desire to enter the surface/skin/orifice of theory:

the skin, and surfaces like that of the text, are really orifices by which to enter.

Not only Blake's works, then, but also the bodies they depict, are meant to be entered; their insides are meant to be visible, not made impenetrable by layers of skin. (32)

Just as the textual bodies' skins which Connolly reads are meant to be entered, so are the words of Hilton. Hilton prattles on about the etymology and related senses of the word vortex, vorare, etc., revealing this methodology of etymology to be a penetrating, de-skinning of sorts; deconstructively treating words as orifices that are meant to be entered, their inner connections made visible.

However, after tracing the Latinate root of *vorare*, "to devour," Hilton single-mindedly sets out to make a case for the vagina as the vortex. Hilton cites numerous associations where the vortex is "a translation of 'female' [...] a psychoanalytic interpretation of the vortex as the vagina" (206), even referring to Burke's anxiety over the "vortex" of the French Revolution. It is this reference to the French Revolution that is the clincher, or should I say the *sphincter*.

The French Revolution – this reference, if nothing else, draws an indexical line between the vortex and the anus rather than between the vortex and vagina. Consider here the popular references, rhetoric of the Revolution, which are primarily scatological. As Claude Gandelman in his essay "'Patri-arse': Revolution as Anality in the Scatological Caricatures of the Reformation and the French Revolution" notes: "the scatological imagery is, indeed, an upside-down structure inside an upside-down structure" (15). There was the presentation of "the King as 'father arse.' This last manipulation was salient especially in the caricatures of the French Revolution" (21).



You cannot speak of vortex, fibre, and the French Revolution all in the same breath and not invoke the anus. Hilton says “‘Vortex,’ like ‘fibre,’ shows itself as a somewhat indeterminate word, though evoking great power and energy” (206); ignoring the anus but admitting the word is indeterminate... open, then, already to a queering, new anal direction: not limited to the vaginal reading he and others perform. By drawing attention to the butt, Blake is explicitly queered.

Furthermore, since Hilton describes the vortex as having “great power and energy,” and also mentions Burke, it appears that a closer examination of Burke’s writings on the French Revolution, particularly in terms of his description of gender, reveals the male gender of having great power and energy (via the rousing Revolutionaries. He also laments the very loss of this great power via the lack of chivalry). Burke also displays anxiety over his innards: “We are not the converts of Rousseau [...] In England we have not yet been completely emboweled of our natural entrails” (106-7). Burke reveals here how he sees the Revolution as being powerful enough to penetrate one’s entrails. And so again, Hilton equates the vortex with great energy and also admits to Burke’s characterization of the French Revolution as a vortex. Through Burke’s charge of male sexuality/prowess as this great power and energy, we can align the vortex more along the lines of the male (w)hole rather than female one.

Strangely enough, Hilton admits that vortex is a “somewhat indeterminate word,” but he manages to overlook the parallel way in which vaginal veil – invoking here the hymen – is also an indeterminate word. Hilton’s reference to the vagina as veil provides here an

opportunity to slip through the loophole. As Lucy notes, “[t]he hymen as the veil or tissue in general (and not exclusively a membrane belonging only to women) occupies a sort of ‘non-space’ between an inside and an outside” (49). Even more explicitly, Derrida notes that hymen also stands for the “filmy membrane enveloping certain bodily organs; for example, says Aristotle, the heart or the intestines” (Dissemination 213). The hymen’s link with the intestines is overlooked.

Furthermore, the fact that Hilton explicitly compares vortex with fibre leaves me to point out how the hymen too interweaves many senses, such as “membrane,” “tissue,” “textile,” “fabrics” “canvases” and “spider web” (213). Thus, if the hymen can be conceptually torn from the property/propriety of the female, then certainly so can the even more “indeterminate” word, “vortex” – it just requires tearing Hilton a new one, or at least tearing his reading away from this text. I think Hilton ignores the anal vortex here because he has been sucked into it; perhaps ass first, leaving him looking at the only thing in sight, the vagina.

It is back again in that grave chapter, where in a surprising, most confessional turn, Hilton somewhat out of place admits that “[w]e all know the desire not to know, to misread, or, having read, to forget” (27). Does this sentence from Hilton redeem the repressed anal reading? Is this an admission of a deliberately denied reading? Of resisting a reading that would so erotically swallow its readers? Of keeping out of Blakean body criticism that which is bawdy?

*(B)anal Blake*

Behind Urizen's head on the illuminated title page to the Book of Urizen is a gravesite/grave-sight. The image has been interpreted as upright stones, a sideways letter B; commandment tablets; tombstones, even castle architecture. Undoubtedly it is many things to many people. Paul Mann alone, in his essay "The Book of Urizen," sees the looming shape behind Urizen as "wings" (50), "tombstones" (51), "doors of a stony cavern" (51), and an "entrance to the book" (51). Adding to the divergence of readings, I offer this jejune one: an incredibly bulbous buttock raised high into the air. All these possible readings of the buttocks complement the multitude of possible ways in which to read Urizen's name. One critic, Hazard Adams, playfully cycles through many bawdily interpretations of Urizen: "You Risen," "Your reason," "Urine," "Uranus," and "Your Anus" (439).

Another issue that arises as a result of the buttocks is the limitation of the William Blake Archive. Although this extensive database allows for a "buttocks" field, the search results are limited to plates from Jerusalem, Europe, and America. In all actuality there are far more mentions of the buttocks in Blake's work – many more obvious examples even beyond the title page of Urizen. Then, there is the more general disappointment of its hypertext structure, which aggravates the butt's literal disembodiment or disembowelment in the way that it is only a butt if the Archive tags it as one. The Archive testifies to how tightly policed Blake's buttocks are.

This dirty reading certainly opens wide the interpretation of the entire title page, evoking on a larger scale a view from/of the anus/rectum: the trees with their fibrous limbs are inked brown and help to evoke the insides of the rectum. We are inside the rectum then. As visitors, we gawk. We see the tears and scars. What Sherry sees as “double columns” (140) in an “environment of stone” (141), I see as “double cheeks” in an “environment of sex and shit.” This is to see Urizen as “horror-zone,” Mann’s clever interpretation of the ambiguity surrounding the pronunciation of Urizen’s name (“The Book of Urizen” 50). As uncomfortable as this reading may feel, it isn’t without grounding. Peter Otto ploughs the way for anal readings of Blake in Europe, and many critics have rightfully interpreted the title page of Urizen as overwhelmingly evoking the grave. Simon Watney and Leo Bersani, using the backdrop of AIDS, bring us full circle, examining the grave in its relation to the rectum. I am cheekily combining all these threads.

### *Rump Roast*

We can see Urizen’s own relation to the through the figure of the hog. Like the hog, Urizen occupies an ambivalent position between categories, such as life/death, food/feces. Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque is a good framework to apply to Urizen, particularly considering its inverted structure and the inverted placement of Urizen’s buttocks. As Young notes, “[t]he carnivalesque move is to turn upside down or inside out, to invert or reverse” (113). More specifically, however, Urizen’s body language allows him to be read as Bakhtin’s clown: “This is manifested in other movements of the clown: the buttocks persistently trying to take the place of the head and the head of the

buttocks” (Bakhtin 353). Such a reversal degrades the body and the mouth. Loosely, the clown connects back to another freakish member of the carnival, the precocious pig:

To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously . . . , to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth. (Bakhtin 21)

The pig is a metaphor for the rectum. Watney, in Policing Desire, from whom Bersani simply borrows the title of his essay, explores the connection between the grave and the rectum more fully and physically than Bersani, grounding himself in the AIDS discourse, making the body and the writings about it meet on the physical body, in an orifice. With Watney, the metaphor of grave/rectum is fully fleshed out. Still, both Watney and Bersani – particularly in Homos – are capable and comfortable doing dirty work; in speaking candidly about the policed nature of the male rectum.

Watney writes, “[t]hat the male rectum is the most thoroughly policed part of the male anatomy suggests that a particular effort is needed to redirect the libido away from deeply repressed memories of anal erotic pleasure in infancy” (126). Watney certainly touches a nerve in terms of all that seems to be repressed in Blake studies. So far, until now, amidst all the Blakean criticism, a rectal reading of the title page of Urizen has been repressed.

To help dig out and into this repressed rectum, and uncover another instance of how everything fits together, we might touch (on) Genet. In Funeral Rites, Genet describing a rim job touches upon some of the same imagery I have been evoking here:

Then I tried hard to do as good a job as a drill. As the workman in the quarry leans on his machine that jolts him amidst splinters of mica and sparks from his drill, a merciless sun beats down on the back of his neck, and a sudden dizziness blurs everything and sets out the usual palm trees and springs of a mirage, in like manner a dizziness shook my prick harder, my tongue grew soft, forgetting to dig harder, my head sank deeper into the damp hairs, and I saw the eye of Gabes [the anus] become adorned with flowers, with foliage, become a cool bower which I crawled to and entered with my entire body, to sleep on the moss there, in the shade, to die there. (253)

The stone imagery here only heightens the comparison between stones and butts. There is another sense, a more political sense in which the stone touches the anus; the gravestone and AIDS. As Watney notes, “Aids offers a new sign for the symbolic machinery of repression, making the rectum a grave” (126). More important is the surprising similarity in description (sparks, sun) between Genet and Blake’s Urizen; the level of detail also complements the intricate sketching of buttocks and anuses in Blake’s Notebook (16).

The fact that the ‘stone’ on the title page of Urizen appears to be a blank slate nicely complements the text’s virginity; it not having been previously sexed up. However, what cannot be ignored is the dirt of the scene. The brown inking at the top of the plate invokes the rectal walls. As Bersani notes, “[t]here is, to be sure, a reversal of given terms here: the anus produces life, waste is fecund, from death new landscapes emerge. But perhaps such reversals could take place only after the entire field of resignifying potentialities has been devastated” (Homos 179). Perhaps this is why a fertile anal reading is only coming

now (or it isn't even here yet); coming only after seemingly every possible angle and interpretation has been given on Urizen; after it has been exhausted.

*Putting the ASS back in the GrASS*

As Bersani explains, the

solution to the problem of revolutionary beginnings condemned to repeat old orders: he dies so that repetition itself may become an initiating act. This can be accomplished only if dying is conceived, and experienced, as jouissance. The fertility of rimming depends on its being immediately productive. The hallucinatory excitement induced in Genet by his foraging tongue gives birth at once to the luxuriant bouquets and bowers of his writing. (Homos 179)

Bersani's description of the relationship between flowers and fucking offers a new approach to Blake's writing. This is interesting because it allows for a discussion of virility without reproduction; it taints the flowers as sexual recreation rather than necessary procreation.

*Stitch meets Gitch: Puckered Anus*

My 'shitty' reading, following Genet, betrays what Bersani calls "the ethic of seriousness" that "governs our usual relation to art, inviting us to view literature, for example, not as epistemological and moral monuments but, possibly, as cultural droppings" (Homos 180-1). To return from the sow to the sew, from the rectum back to

the thread at hand, I pass through the anus. But(t) even the anus looks like it has been gathered tight, a butchered sewing job, pulled hard, puckered. But I will let this line go now...

I follow Bersani who says, "In a society where oppression is structural, constitutive of sociality itself, only what society throws off – its mistakes or its pariahs – can serve the future" (180). Picking up Bersani's thought, I am here working with both the thrown off line of thinking that criticism has ignored, and the thrown off line. Speaking of blurring lines and images, scrawling sexualities and signature, both coalesce in the signature of William Blake. In constant negotiation with the frame, Blake also ties up the relation of the framing line, with the signature and its physical embodiment. Sherry's essay, "The 'Predicament' of the Autograph: 'William Blake,'" gives an excellent reading of William Blake's autograph/signature as appended specifically to his friend's album. It appears that the line is part of the youth's body, making a completed circuit by either entering or exiting from the hands and knee. As Sherry notes,

The signature may be an epitaph, on the one hand, a downward displacement into absence and death traced by the downward movement of its framing line, or this same line may be the shroud just thrown off by the resurrected body of the youth who leaps upward like the figure of the resurrected Christ in the frontispiece to *Night Thoughts*. (151)

Here we see both the line (as shroud) thrown off the figure, but also the line is thrown off (discarded) for the sake of Sherry's excited possibility of developing a resurrection figure. The line itself, then, has thrown Sherry off. I do not believe the figure is a gesture



at the resurrected Christ, or any immortal angel for that matter (no wings). The more appropriate likeness of the figure is simply a human, a fleshy, finite being. While this reading is not nearly as glamorous, or archetypal (or even ‘literary’), seeing the figure as a finite human is both a) more appropriate to the context of the finite signature and b) realistic: since as humans we have been likened to defecating angels. Sherry tries to set up the circuit as follows: the body may be held down by the text, or the body may be freed from this text. The actuality is that neither body nor text can be read as being ‘immortal,’ freed from the bounds of the grave, of death. In fact, tethering the text to the body, literally drawing a line between the signature and the body only doubly reinforces the finitude of each.

If we consider the orgasm to be “le petit mort,” we might rather read the reference to who “has died several times since” as a colloquial description of one who “has orgasmed several times since.” To draw this out even further, we could break the line breaks and read the writing as continuous (following the flowing line of the figure): “who has died several times since January 16, 1826.” In order to read this way, the eye must move from the right of the page to the left, helplessly following the flowing line weaving around the text belonging to the figure. This traversing, or rather *perversing* of the line brings our gaze across the genitals of the figure, pausing there for a moment to wonder where, if anywhere at all, the genitals are. Blake’s specific placement of the line – having admitted it was not the result of chance, and thus not an autograph: “my own [...] in some measure Works of Art & not of Nature or Chance” (Erdman Complete 698) – supports this *perversing* of the line. Still, Blake’s ambiguous understanding of what exactly his own

illustrated inscription is keeps the possibility open for this to be art, “which a Man Does with his Thought & Mind” (698), or autograph, “Writ helter skelter like a hog upon a rope” (698).

If we might read the line in the instance of Blake’s signature figure, what is there to say that we don’t manipulate every possible theoretical approach/framework in approaching the lines belonging to the signature alone?

Snart suggests we refrain from using handwriting analysis to determine “the” William Blake:

There is of course the danger that if such autographic issues begin to dominate approaches to Blake’s annotations, there will inevitably be attempts to create a system to identify Blake’s handwriting. However, handwriting analyses are inexact endeavors at best. (170)

However, I find Snart’s phrase “inexact endeavors” strange. Is not all criticism, all communication for that matter, only ever “inexact endeavors”? All handwriting, all literary analysis – are these all not inexact endeavors? If this is its charge, its characteristic, then I find handwriting analysis as valid as the rest of our critical endeavors. Furthermore, Snart’s imagined system that identifies Blake’s handwriting already exists; the Blake Archive, functioning as a database, has already identified Blake’s handwriting, through the process of selection and collection. Ultimately, Snart’s understanding of and argument against using handwriting analysis is weak, his fears already realized and rendered obsolete.

Still, such “inexact endeavors” might further complicate the picture, and it is in hopes of such “inexact endeavors” that we still find Blake and begin again. I argue for the use of handwriting analysis not as a means of coming to some reductive objective meaning, but as a means of contributing to an excess of methodologies, procedures, critical perspectives: of reading and writing the signature not just grammatologically but graphologically as well.

Snart’s understanding of handwriting analysis misses the point: it clearly cannot mean to come to any solid inherent truth, and I do not believe it even pretends to do so. Even Snart himself acknowledges Blake’s range of styles:

Blake worked in a diverse array of contexts, each perhaps eliciting a different hand. He worked sometimes on his own designs, sometimes as an engraver for hire, sometimes on manuscript drafts [...] sometimes composing directly on the copper plate. (170)

Snart is correct in recognizing that an artist as diverse as Blake given his interest in continual change and experimentation might use multiple signature styles. Thus, given Blake’s own multitudinous styles and signatures, handwriting analysis as an “inexact endeavor” seems strikingly fitting.

*CHAPTER 6: Derriere - Derrida*

Graphological analysis is another form of a close reading; grammatology for words and images. It is the reading of a letter/character and tracing its picto-etymology within the text(s), between texts. As Samantha Matthews suggests in a footnote,

Modern handwriting analysis has considerable scientific and legal credibility, and is routinely used in forensics and human resources. [...] The reading relies heavily on biographical facts; objective analysis is impossible where the handwriting and signature are immediately recognizable. (240)

What about applying this to Derrida's own signature? Using the idea that there is nothing outside the text, along with the signature's own ambiguous position as inside/outside the text, we are justified in 'reading' the signature as text and thus performing, with all means possible, an analytical breakdown: not even the signature, nothing about the signature, is excluded from this reading.

Furthermore, since we are never coming to any sort of objective, definitive conclusion or argument, what harm is there in using an approach that is fundamentally unable to be objective... does this not make it all the more fitting? We are able, then, to perform more than a grammatological reading; we can extend its reach to include a graphological reading.

As a sort of introduction to Derrida's 'own' signature, we should return again to an example from the nineteenth-century. Matthews, in "Reading the 'Sign-Manual': Dickens

and Signature,” identifies the period’s “obsession with handwriting and autograph” in relation to Charles Dickens’ own “ambivalent” relationship with his signature. While ambivalent is not the most apt characterization of Dickens’ treatment of his signature (given his exchange of signature for money), Matthews’ analysis of the two “influential and co-dependent cultural movements: a fashion for collecting autographs, and graphology, the pseudo-scientific analysis of character traits from handwriting,” helps complicate the presentation of the signature (232).

While only one sentence explicitly refers to Derrida, in the initial description of the signature, Matthews’ selective quotations from Dickens’ Little Dorrit reveal the text’s excellent ability in being a precursor to Derridean signature theory. The Circumlocation Office’s operates on a system of “checking and counter-checking, signing, and counter-signing” (Dickens qtd. in Matthews 238).

Then, there is the mysterious traveler whose signature is described as “in a small, complicated hand, ending with a long lean flourish, not unlike a lasso thrown at all the rest of the names” (Dickens qtd. in Matthews 239). According to Matthews, graphologically “a ‘small, complicated hand’ denotes a secretive and scheming character, while the menacing ‘lasso’ flourish reveals the writer’s dark designs” (239).

Unfortunately, there is no further speculation on this scrawl – perhaps revealing Matthews’ own ambivalent relationship with the signature. Curiously enough, this “mysterious lone guest” who adds his name to the guest list at the Swiss convent in Little Dorrit has slipped between the scholastic crack; a crack that might be explained by

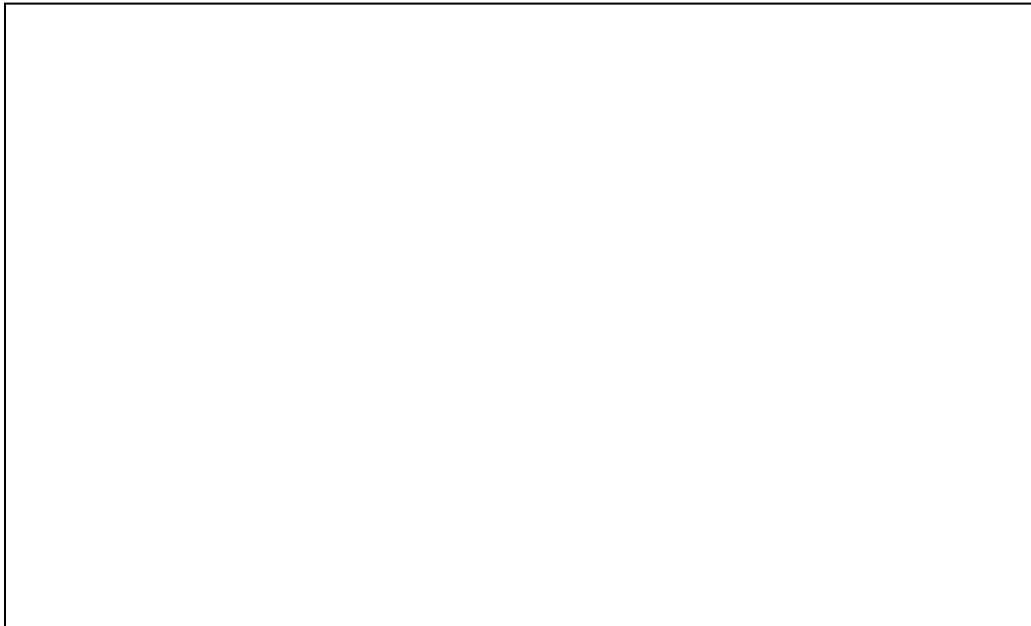
Kamuf: “the undecidable trait of the signature must fall into the crack of the historicist/formalist opposition organizing most discourses about literature” (Signature 13). If the signature is inescapably related to a crack, we might also recall then the crack of Blake, as discussed earlier: the vortex/butt crack he places directly in the face of the reader – this technique too; a sort of “signature style.”

Just as Vladimir Nabokov says that “cosmic” is always at risk of losing its “s,” I say that the “scholastic” is always at risk of gaining an “s” – scholas”s”tic. It is here where we might slip behind the (butt) crack – *derriere* the *derriere* – and find Derrida and his “menacing lasso.”

“Menacing” breaks down into “men/acing”, evoking male Aces, pilots; bringing us back to an earlier sense of the term “weaving”: Air Force slang for pilots pursuing a dangerous course. I bring this up as a way into Derek Liddington’s art installation entitled Top Gun, which brings together Derrida’s own signature carved into the vinyl record soundtrack to the film Top Gun. Although this grammatological reading is not how Liddington describes his project (he describes Derrida simply as a Top Gun amongst theorists), Top Gun perfectly incorporates the men/acing quality of the signature. Connolly notes that it is a fitting mixture of a discarded theoretical figure and a defunct medium. Still, I wonder if Space Cowboys might not have been a more fitting soundtrack to carve Derrida’s signature into, so as also to address *both* the menacing and the lasso.

“Lasso, *n.*” A long rope of untanned hide, from 10 to 30 yards in length, having at the end a noose to catch cattle and wild horses (OED).

Derrida’s signature, as it appears at the end of his essay “Signature Event Context,” appears here:



As you can see, Derrida’s “J,” for Jacques, appears easily/clearly as a lasso figure. The lasso itself also connotatively ties together the “rope” and “hog”; and appears here, finally, as a means of recklessly rounding up the threads of wild lines that weave complexly through fibres, frames, figures and handiwork of the Romantic and postmodern periods.

And maybe my round’em’up methodology is hog-wash.

“Hog-wash, *n.*” Inferior writings of any kind (OED).

Tracing the signature, following the movement of the lasso, involves tracing backwards, backwards to the period where the existing body of signature theory grounded itself in Rousseau. This is not to let Rousseau out of the hog-tie, but to swing Jacques at others: to expand and complicate the number of signature, contexts and events that deconstruction misguidedly believes it has caught. Using my theoretical lasso, “J” (Derrida’s signature), which is a currently underexamined figure in critical theory, I have expanded what is meant by the signature, having extended the understanding of line work; I have also given a better context for the signature, an expanded, richer foundation by focusing on many rather than just Rousseau, as well as offered some concrete historical events – in hopes of further complicating and developing the stain of the signature, in general, as well as the specific signature of Derrida himself.

*“Traded  
into jinglish  
jangle”  
(275.n6),  
Finnegans  
Wake,  
I repeat,  
stands as a  
monstrous  
prophecy  
of our  
postmodernity*

*- Hassan 93*

According to Ihab Hassan, “the creative act is always crooked” (93). This crooked jinglish jangle prophesizes more than just our postmodernity; it uncannily speaks of a



new “J”, the one who continues this jocular writing, Jacques Derrida. The Joycean jinglish janglage describes Derrida’s signature, the crooked appearance of the first letter, “J”. As Hassan talks about Joyce, we now talk about Derrida. To paraphrase Hassan talking about Joyce, to talk about Derrida: We are all Jacquians, crypto-Jacquians, meta-Jacquians, para-Jacquians. We have seen the second coming of the J-man (no, not Jesus but Joyce, and then Jacques). His “J” is a heavy ark, a rainbow, a lasso...

The creative act is also crooked in the sense of being outlawed, a threat. As Derrida, on the subject of threats to the university, suggests:

Certain members of the university can play a part there, irritating the insides of the teaching body like parasites. [...] Now, the possibility of such parasiting appears wherever there is language, which is also to say a public domain, publication, publicity. To wish to control parasiting, if not to exclude it, is to misunderstand, at a certain point, the structure of speech acts. (Eyes of the University 95)

As such, the creative act is the parasitic act.

## Part II: *Begin Again*

While Kamuf's "weaver/ruler" figure theoretically helps to conflate the two separate spheres, public and private, of the eighteenth century, or even to emasculate the traditional figure of the dominant, masculine orator/public figure, the figure also disregards two defining perspectives and histories that complicate the figure, class and gender.

Perhaps it is painfully obvious, the connection between weaving and writing, so much so that I believe we can see their relation as being more concrete than simply metaphorical. Yet, to yoke weaving with ruling, on the basis of "assembling *and* separating" elements (Signature 44), as Kamuf pushes us to do, at least in the political ruminations on the term 'ruling,' is to employ a meaningless metaphor, a figure, which is ironically devoid of any political import, in so far as the demographic (female) it evokes yet excludes. We come to such a strained (ineffective) figure only through the vaguest, most archaic etymological sense of the word 'contract.' More appropriate (and perhaps obvious) would be to consider the immuno-biological sense of 'contract' (as in disease), and the related sense of bodily 'contact.'

### *Contract*

Kamuf throughout her etymological breakdowns of 'contract' appears to choose archaic senses of the word at the cost of the physiological, immunological sense of the word

‘contract.’ Ironically, the result of this is that her title ‘Contracting the Signature’ now functions as the name ‘Rousseau’ did earlier for her; as the name of a problem, “the problem of the idealist exclusion of writing- of materiality, of exteriority – in the name of the subject’s presence to itself” (24), although now in terms of body boundaries.

“contract, v., 5.a.” To enter into, bring upon oneself [...] incur, catch, acquire, become infected with something noxious, as disease, mischief, bad habits or condition; danger, risk, blame, guilt (OED).

Disregarding the biological/physiological sense of the word is particularly surprising considering the environment surrounding Signature Pieces; published in 1988, the same time that there was “an urgent need for [dialectical] engagement” according to James Miller, concerning the period of representation of the AIDS crisis; the same year that MIT Press, reprinted a legendary issue of the New York theory journal October (winter 1987), under the name AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism, which infamously gave voice to radical activism and cultural commentary. Furthermore, 1984 saw the death of Foucault from AIDS. As Miller notes, the rhetoric coming from a multitude of sources, awareness campaigns, drug companies, media coverage, and, I would add, critical theory, during the late 1980s, concerned subjects and styles that were leaky, sweaty, messy, and contaminated.

While critics and cultural theorists such as Watney, in 1987-8, expose the media’s diseased rhetoric in their AIDS commentary, or put together anthologies on AIDS

criticism (Miller 6), Kamuf is speaking their language, employing their rhetorical tools without getting her hands dirty, sanitizing the language of the AIDS discourse/disease, without any dis-ease, without truly dealing with the ‘contract.’ While this may present itself as the perfect opportunity to charge theory with the usual litany of offenses – that it is out of touch with reality, useless, or even just dead, it is also an opportunity to defend it by citing a number of theories that are messy and half-aborted, which because of these characteristics nevertheless survive, and function in a way that blurs the line between simply being an abstract idea and a living/dying figure.

Kamuf following Derrida devotes most of her time to discussing the signature in terms of a contract, in the sense of a promise – i.e. a legal contract. Contract yes, in terms of a promise, but also contract in terms of bodily cont(r)act. While Kamuf, like every other critic describing Derridean signature theory, is correct in describing the legal signature, she, not unlike many deconstructionists, also overlooks the physiological sense of the word implicit in ‘contract’ and the signature. And, for those who do discuss the body, or at least acknowledge its presence and value to the signature, the immunological/bacterial sense of ‘contract’ remains critically untouched.

Capitalizing the ‘S’ on ‘Signature’ is simply a part of adhering to publishing convention in formatting, presentation, etc., general typography, and also the convention of naming of diseases (for the name of the disease to be capitalized). Here, then, I am essentially suggesting that we are dealing with a proper name, that which is not dissimilar to a signature. Unknowingly, Kamuf’s choice of a title (“Contracting the Signature”) becomes

itself a case in point, encased even, in the ambiguous space, or difference among the signature, the proper name, and disease; putting under erasure even those categories that some critics consider to be separate entities. Putting the two together is akin to making the parts touch.

For Kamuf to word it “Contracting the Signature,” capitalizing the ‘S’ on signature, she invokes the sense of disease, although she fails to touch upon it; perhaps a criticism indicative of contemporary criticism itself.

I, however, will touch upon it. In fact, I will go beyond touching. I will make that contract to contract the signature.

## *CHAPTER 7: Body Contract*

I am having Derrida's signature tattooed on my body as a means of embodying, or contextualizing, aspects of this thesis. As Kamuf says, "[t]o quote a text is always to cut into it and interrupt its flow" (Book of Addresses 208). There are other implications of this act that speak to the current critical practices within the Humanities: writing on the body as a new place of critical space; a return from space to place, and comments on the loss of space; of encasement within the university (being asked to give up my office space; academic/artist becomes a sleeper cell). It is an act of violence; cutting into the "property" of Derrida, of the university and Archives Canada (via thesis regulations which limit the thesis to existing only as a computer file), and of my body.

This act of inking and cutting is only fitting in that the signature itself cuts across time, surviving, import (promise) intact, beyond the body to which it belongs. It does so by necessarily being readable and repeatable. For, as Derrida notes,

In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, by altering its identity and its singularity, divides the seal [sceau]. ("Signature" 328)

It is through this necessary sameness and difference that the inherent contradiction/paradox within the signature becomes evident. As Derrida explains, "the condition of possibility for these effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity" (328). The very condition

of the signature necessitates this paradox; revealing the signature itself to be a theoretically contaminated figure; a complex figure, the *pharmakon* – both cure and contaminant.

Iterating such “apocalyptic rhetoric” as my postmodern predecessors irritates O’Gorman, yet is both necessary and appropriate. Identifying the signature as contamination and as *pharmakon* helps to tether this cornerstone of signature theory to something grounded and corporeal, the body, an otherwise strangely unfashionable figure in Derridean signature theory. And so, while the signature in the sense of property and law is easily understood as contractual, the physical sense in which the signature is contractual is mysteriously omitted.

One critic, Sarah Wood, connects the signature’s repeatability, or iterability, with irritability, a bodily state: “Irritability is also about nerves and muscles: “Physiol. and biol. the capacity of being excited to vital action (e.g. motion, contraction, nervous impulse, etc.) by the application of an external stimulus” [OED]” (17). Complementing Wood’s discussion of iterability as irritability is Lucy’s coffee example used to explain iterability:

First thing every morning I make myself a cup of coffee; in fact I make several cups. Each coffee is singular, unique, unlike the others (the second cup is not the first and so on), but each one is also an instance of the same, the general, the others that it resembles and to which it belongs. This is not a feature peculiar to coffee; it’s a condition of the singularity of a thing – any thing – that the thing in

itself belongs to a general form of such things which that particular thing represents. Everything is always therefore a trace, a text, an example of writing [...] The important point to notice here is that repetition is never pure; it always leads to alteration. (59)

Even though Lucy doesn't explicitly connect iterability with irritability, as Wood does, his example begs for this pairing! Lucy is right about the coffee; each cup brings about a change. Most obviously, in the case of coffee, iterability (many cups of coffee) is connected to irritability – although I can from experience say that the absence of iterability is also linked to irritability!

Inadvertently suggested in Wood's commentary on irritability/iterability and what goes otherwise critically untouched is how the signature is contractual in terms of the physiological, muscular contractions involved in the signing of the signature. It is this bodily sense of the signature as (muscularly) contractual that warrants more attention and provides yet another way in which vaporous signature theory can ground itself. Perhaps, by talking about the signature without talking about the body's contractions, we can infer that this is proof of a phantom signer? A ghost in the machine? Proof, undoubtedly, of a ghost in the theory – (in the theory machine?).

#### *Iterability + Irritability After (Reading) Derrida*

We might continue the commentary on iterability and irritability, particularly as they meet in Derrida himself. With Derrida we are always already left having to repeat



ourselves, others, in such a manner that leaves us irritable. So, there is the way in which Derrida is also the name of a problem, the new Rousseau whose signature is Jacqued off onto all of us. The wild disseminating “J,” the lasso of his signature has (always already) hogtied us all.

And yet, there is the insularity of deconstructive thinking as we undeniably continue to feed off of Derrida. Writing about Derrida explicitly demands the signature and the irritability that results from reading his labyrinthine writing. Sarah Wood’s review of Nicholas Royle’s After Derrida, and Robert Smith’s Derrida and Autobiography reveals the difficulties in writing about Derrida. Just as X marks the spot of the signature, Sarah Wood explains, “[t]his ‘practice of writing after Derrida’ would be ‘a theory of ex-citation,’ concerned with both ‘iterability’ – and irritability” (Royle qtd. in Wood 17).

I argue that this writing Royle, Wood, Kamuf, and Bennington speak of is a writing more of *extra*-citation than ex-citation. It is impossible not to say more, especially within the discourse surrounding Derrida, of Derrida. Trying to write about Derrida is different than writing *with* Derrida, as do Bennington in “Derridabase” and Kamuf in Book of Addresses. Gregory Ulmer, too, stresses the importance of writing *with* theory rather than *about* it, in his most lucid example of this, Applied Grammatology. Note the self-referentiality of my point: I cannot even begin (again) to write about Derrida without first having to write about other names.

I would argue that contemporary critics need to roll up their sleeves and admit that the stain (theory of stain, stain of theory?) is still there – as is the *urge* to *stain*; in the sense of a call to arms, as well as anagrammatically speaking, the *signature*. We need to engage, ingest, the leaky, staining, messy, chaotic, entropic way of thinking! This demands engaging the messy body with the chaotic theory of deconstruction. Some critics, such as Lee Quinby, engage the sticky signature through ‘pissed criticism.’ Nowhere else is it easier to see this parasitical relationship forming than in the art world, where this kind of thinking positively festers.

### *Body Farm*

Asides from writing *with* Derrida, what about writing *on* him, as in, *on the subject of* Derrida, or, more literally, *on* Derrida?

O’Gorman, multimedia performance artist/cultural theorist, and self-proclaimed ex-Derridean scholar, forces a physical relationship with Derrida. His art installation, Derridraw, involves growing seeds through drilled holes in Chora L, which lies split open, cover to cover, in a planter box. Such are O’Gorman’s efforts of *working through* Derrida, or more poignantly, *grounding* Derrida.

While in some sense O’Gorman’s reaction appears to be natural, there is also the sense that this effort to ‘ground’ Derrida is reminiscent of a body dump, an amateur murder, a violent reaction to what so many express, that is, frustration with poststructuralism? It is

after all, only half-buried. Or, considering O’Gorman’s French farming background, perhaps this is a modest burial, a transplanting, translation (back?) to French soil. Or, even a testament to the fertility of Derrida’s writing.

Still, only the front and back covers are used, arguably suggesting that Derrida, the bulk of poststructural theory, has yet again, slipped through O’Gorman’s fingers. Now, to really get under the nails of O’Gorman, much to his annoyance, I postulate that Derridraw gesticulates more to the immortality, the eternal naissance of Derrida’s writing, rather than its death. If O’Gorman returns us to dirt, we are already on ripe archetypal terrain for biblical imagery. It is not a stretch then to see Jesus’ resurrection from the tomb, leaving behind only the clothing, as analogous to the French Father leaving behind the covers of his Chora L.

### *Thesis Tattoo*

This ‘call to arms’ I spoke of earlier, to (re)employ the messy theories and embody them in the messy body, will have its own embodiment in the form of a tattoo on my body.

The signature demands the body, and more importantly, the body’s finitude. It is this finite body that almost always slips through the cracks in talking about the signature. Still, there is a trace. As Kamuf says, “My signature is a ghostly trace of my absence, a reminder not only of the limits on ‘mes forces’ or ‘ma vue’ but of the finitude that is ‘me’” (Signature 77). This reminder is especially poignant when it is written on the body.

There needs to be risk again in theory. Risk encountered, confronted, ingested, invited into the human body, but with the greatest risk of all; remaining human, choosing to remain and embrace a finite, fleshy, body.

Is it possible for me – here, anymore? – to get my hands dirty with words? Submitted, regulated, formulated/formatted electronically, I have not so much as a paper cut from this project. Certainly compared to other writing technologies, such as dip pens or printing presses, where it is impossible not to get dirty hands, I am left here, sanitized. The only relief comes from CNN, which informs me that harmful micro bacteria live in-between the computer keys, a concept I won't develop here, but that literally embodies Burroughs' word-as-virus theory, of the poststructural sense of word as parasitical.

Coupled with this move towards an untouchable uploaded space is the loss of physical space, or place. Given the hugely increased number of grad students to the department (more students than office space), it may be safe to say that there is no more room in the graveyard! The fact that the English department has been likened to a graveyard is exacerbated by the fact that the English department just built three new closets next to my office and you know what people hide in closets – skeletons!

Maybe the lack of room is why I cannot get my hands dirty?

If not dirty, then at least bloody; after all, anagrammatically speaking, words = sword. I am left to dig into the body now at the point of my tattoo, a means of bringing the academic space INSIDE the body. My body will become the site of work space –playing on the *tabula rasa* idea – there is a new sense for the expression “going into work.”

### *Syringe Writing*

*I am going to try to write of and from an untenable, even painful place: the point of sharpest contact with certain texts of Jacques Derrida's, at the tip of the pointed instrument of a writing, there where a common language and remnants of an idiom cut into each other and words split apart. – Peggy Kamuf Book of Addresses 199*

Derrida cuts into our theoretical psyche, a relationship that cuts, stabs, stings. Derrida cuts – his name, his signature, his remains. Kamuf asks,

What is it in literature in particular or at its edges that cuts, or perhaps that stabs like a sword or stings like a syringe with ‘a sharpened point’? [...] Why is it that the literal mark of literature is blood, a bleeding passion that is quickly cooled by the drying ink, which is the cut's strange survival? (Book 199)

The answer to Kamuf's question of what it is that “stabs like a sword” is words – Derrida's sword anagrammatically rearranged is *words*.

Tattooing Derrida's signature is a means of literalizing that mark which marks theory, of physically embodying the mark along the edge of his texts, the signature, to show that the

edge does cut. Engaging the physicality of Derrida's signature involves cutting, stabbing and stinging. It is taking risk. It marks the body, as well as the signature.

This tattoo embodies the possibility and practice of counterfeiting, in the sense that the one who signs Derrida's signature is not Derrida himself. Also, there is another phenomenon at work in my project that isn't directly touched upon by Derrida: the notion that in counterfeiting the signature there could be a multiplicity of signers/counterfeiters. In this instance, I have contaminated the notion that the signature is the mark of one signer; here, the tattooed signature exists as the multilayered-tracings of Professors Stan Fogel and Tristanne Connolly, myself, and the tattooist. I will bear the mark of their hands on my body, collected and emptied under the name Jacques Derrida. The many have contaminated the possibility and presentation of the one. They have all signed signatures that weren't theirs; signatures that do not correspond to their proper names. Ultimately, then, this signing has contaminated their signatures. It is a reminder of Derrida's absence, of his finitude – and inscribed on mine, rather than on an immortal surface, it reinforces its and my own finitude. Derrida is groundable, albeit with some violence.

Is this an act of frustration? A cutting edge example of parasuicide? An act of necrophilia? Or a revealing of what is always already beneath the skin (?), as British tattooist Chinchilla symbolically describes her practice: "I only open up the skin and let it out" (qtd. in Fleming 63). Still, regardless of what it is or isn't, and perhaps in order to justify the relevance, or literariness, of this tattoo thesis to my "literary studies," what

must be remembered is that as the mark of literature (or as that which marks my marking of literature) *il faut que ca saigne* – it has to bleed. As Kamuf notes, “the passion of literature is associated with the passion of love, with the alliance of two beings of flesh and blood” (Book 200). After all, *saigner* and *signer*; to bleed and to sign, is, as Kamuf notes, “the slim difference of a letter” (210). While all this does smack of marriage, which is another sort of blood contract, we are not both in love. But, perversely I might be in love with him, a corpse; this might be a performance or event of necrosexuality/necrotextuality; Derridead. Clearly, here, I have been seduced by the Name-of-the-Father-of-Theory. Derridead = Ed (my father’s name) + Derrida.

Kamuf notes, “[s]o as not to get mixed up in the mechanics of literary confession, one dreams while writing of causing to disappear the instrument that receives the blood in small specimens, but not at a small price” (211). Derrida is mistaken if he thinks the syringe is the answer: “I always dream of a pen that would be a syringe, a suction point rather than that very hard weapon with which one must inscribe, incise, choose, calculate...once the right vein has been found, no more toil” (“Circumfession” 10-12). The syringe is also capable of being a weapon, committing and inflicting great violence and pain. Still, the closest we come to a disembodied writing is with the computer, which removes the sharp edges, stylus and paper, where you might cut yourself. (It should be noted however, that the effects of writing at the computer can be quite painful – to speak of my own sciatic nerve.) Still, the desire for a writing to come naturally from the body, ultimately is a writing without touching, one that is void of passion and removes the possibility to literally bleed.

I am not the first to hook Derrida (nor even claim to have hooked him in the best spot). My treatment of Derrida's signature builds off of Valerio Adami's treatment of it. Derrida indicates his point of interest in "the angular signature of Adami [...] I yielded, even before knowing it, as if I were read in advance, written before writing, prescribed, seized, trapped, hooked" ("+R" 156). Kamuf notes that: "There is all the same an arrow, a pointed tip, a very small spot in Adami's drawing that Derrida does not pick up [...] Indicated with a tiny trait, the barb of the hook extends beyond the muzzle of the fish" (Book 215). And, there is all the same a "J" that Kamuf does not pick up: that this 'barb of the hook' is the initial "J" – and yet another manifestation of the menacing lasso of Jacques Derrida.

So, while I am not the first or only one to hook Derrida, I will do it with a literal syringe. According to Kamuf, "[t]he worst kind of contamination thus circulates in this element of needle/pen exchange" (212). Without ever actually naming it, it appears that Kamuf is referring to the tattoo, where both needle/blood and pen/ink meet. Arguably, what makes this kind of mingling so atrocious is the way in which it requires literal bodies to mix with theoretical bodies. Atrociousness aside, it is almost uncanny that my project involves tattooing the barbed "J" that pierces the fish in Adami's painting, since, as DeMello points out, tattoo "[n]eedles get sharper over time, rather than duller, due to their constant friction inside the needle tube. They often curl over into a *fish hook* shape from too much use as well" (201, my emphasis). As Margrit Shildrick, who examines the monstrous postmodern body, puts it: "I have no hesitation in moving between material and abstract registers" (108).



My project recognizes similarities with the Irigarayan concept of corporeality, which Shildrick identifies as a positive perspective of corporeality: “positive precisely insofar as it is mediated by touch, by mucus, and by the mingling of blood” (113). It is through this economy of touch, rather than detached gaze that we see Irigaray’s sense of the body as a “sensuous engagement both with the other and with the world” (113). Shildrick’s description of Irigaray’s engagement as sensuous helps to tease out the erotics of the skin, of the site – rather than sight – of touch; for example, when Irigaray says, “[t]he internal and external horizon of my skin interpenetrating with yours wears away their edges, their limits, their solidity. Creating another space – outside my framework. An opening of openness” (qtd. in Shildrick 119). The particular location of the tattoo amplifies this opening.

Finally, and what I find most poignant in what Shildrick has to say about Irigaray is how she reveals “an acceptance of bodyliness in all its forms” (119). From bodyliness we are implicitly connected to bodylines; the line between them, quite clear. Bodyliness and bodylines have frequently, then, throughout this thesis, merged, overlapped, become inseparably interwoven, and, of course, draw closest to me in my tattoo.

### *Bodylines(s) and Bodylines*

These two concepts literally merge in the tattoo, particularly in the tradition of what bodies wore tattoo designs. There was a literal connection between defined bodyliness and bodylines, as in the inky lines drawn on the body.

Margo DeMello, in Bodies of Inscription, offers a socio-historical account of the tattoo in America. DeMello cites Ed Hardy, infamous tattoo guru, who notes that “often the earliest ‘homemade’ tattoo efforts with sewing needle and India Ink ... express the initials or name of the wearer” (65). According to DeMello, the “simplest form of the literal tattoo is the word tattoo, and the most basic form of the word tattoo is the name tattoo” (65). DeMello explains that “the most literal tattoo was the identification tattoo. Servicemen, for example, often had their names, service number, rank, and date of birth tattooed on them” (65). And, even outside the military, similar practices of identity marking were occurring. As Chuck Eldridge notes, as a result of the Lindbergh baby kidnapping in 1932, and the first issuing of the Social Security card in 1936, a large number of men, women and children were getting tattooed (qtd. in DeMello 65). They were, in effect, having their identity, an identity, tattooed on them. Most interestingly, even the government was interested in this practice of bodyliness/bodylines, evident when in 1955, “the assistant secretary of defense suggested that all U.S. citizens have their blood type tattooed onto their bodies in anticipation of a military attack on the United States, and many citizens evidently complied” (Eldridge qtd. in DeMello 66).

DeMello refers to these people with tattoos as the ‘wearers’ of the tattoos. She repeatedly talks about the “wearer” of the tattoo (138), reminding me of how *wearer* is like *weaver*. Just as it doesn’t take much to see the connection between bodyliness and bodylines, it doesn’t take much to see the connection between wearer and weaver, especially considering Hardy’s description of the earliest tattoos being done with ink and the sewing needle. Furthermore, the connection between wearer and weaver in terms of tattooing is

closer than with clothing, as the tattoo is woven into the body fabric – neither wearing off nor wearing out.

This conflation of tattoo wearer and weaver is clearest in Paul Mann's Masocriticism, wherein one section links the tattoo both with "stupid Rousseauism" (177) and with the T-shirt. Mann notes, "[t]he tattoo, like the T-shirt, transforms the body into another agora, a corporeal mini-mall, but for what we might call *fuzzy capital*" (179). He says that the tattoo indicates "like just about everything else proposed as an exercise of difference, it too links the individual with the 'economy of signs' in his or her most intimate dimensions" (179). For Mann, the tattoo isn't simply one *or* the other, radical *or* capital, and for that ambiguity he calls it *fuzzy*: "Fuzzy capital is an economy that is neither simply capital nor effectively subversive, neither recuperated nor liberated, but the collapse of any dialectical tension between them" (180). Here, Mann sharply articulates the complex economy at work in/under the tattoo: "The tattoo makes the skin a zone in which capital thrives under the aegis of its subversion and mutates even as it survives" (180). It is interesting to note that it was suggested to me by O'Gorman that I make a Derridean signature clothing line rather than have it tattooed on my body. For O'Gorman the tattoo smacks of too much "hero worship," but as the fuzzy Mann reveals, the T-shirt participates in the same fuzzy economy. So, it seems far more perverse to bring capitalism underneath the skin that is more intimate than what a T-shirt touches. I am able, via its location on my body, specifically my "most intimate dimensions," to really capitalize on Mann's fuzzy capital (!)

*Conclusions: Getting Off (Of) Derrida*

As I near the end of this writing, my thoughts turn to the way in which this is still far from over. I now understand Derrida clearest when he says, “[t]he whole does nothing but begin” (“Law” 219). In the way that its completion will only be its beginning, it will end *only on paper*, continuing on the skin that will be cut off from this (writing). And, since the signature requires a countersignature, in effect, this thesis will not be closed, the signature not having yet been countersigned.

Sometime after I have written here about signing the text, I will have finally signed it. I, here, then, write *avant mes lettres*. I will sign shortly hereafter, although it will have appeared long before this. The signature complicates temporality, and I am telling you now, a before which will come after, of its betrayal.

I will have signed a contract with the University that I am the author of this text. I will sign it once I have met the requirements concerning structure and format. My signature will establish this thesis’ completion only in effect of the countersignatures of my reader, supervisor, and Graduate Office. It is only a signature, after all, as Bennington notes, “on condition that it call or promise a countersignature” (157). And although my signature is “no more than a promise of a countersignature” (157), there is no place within this text for such a countersigning. I have made the promise, here, to contract the signature... and yet, do not sign.

As such, any appearance of closure, of completion, offered up by the signature, the mark of the law, is an illusion. This text is not closed; I have not kept all my promises. Yet. Despite all these measures put in place of signing and countersigning, as a means of lawfully governing the text, there is the way in which my text still escapes. I have slipped through the loophole – the loophole itself as figure of the signature – in that I have yet to be tattooed.

Here, in this thesis, I have made a contract to have Derrida's signature tattooed on me. I have even appended my own signature, made the mark of a mark to mark the event of marking. And yet, it, all these marks, will mean nothing until/unless it is signed, or more aptly countersigned – signed by the other, the tattooist. As Bennington notes, "we always remain indebted to the first signature [...] But by the same token, this first signature remains in our debt too, depending on our response to that call" (165).

So, while I will have signed this document, attesting to the completion of it, there is a sense in which it will still escape the law; having not kept all my promises. Within the bounds it still goes unbound. And so, here, at a place/point where you might expect to have conclusions drawn, you have the possibility of conclusions drained. Have I been lying or pretending? After all, as Bennington notes, the signature "pretends to gather up all the moments of the 'enunciation' of the text into this single moment of meta-enunciation which closes the already written book for the writer and opens it for the reader" (154). The signature is a ruse in temporality, amongst other things, by being presented before the text, when it has come after it.

And so we are back again to begin again. The name of the signature is a ruse; a ruse sewing it all up – sounding a lot like *Rousseau*. We are back (again) through the ruse to the name of a problem, of the problem of the paradoxical signature, that name of the problem that promises to be associated with Rousseau.

Still, I have refined and refashioned (*effiné*) the problem; further complicating the signature by implicating and complicating other names and signatures. *Effiner* is a play on my last name, *Effinger*. The “g” escapes the etymology here; interesting since in my future work the “g” will play large role. French theories seem to be (always already) the name of a problem, so it especially interesting to note that by cutting the ‘g’ out of my surname changes it from German to French. This grammatically embodies to a degree the violence between German and French that Joan Hawkins examines in Georges Franju’s film Les yeux sans visage (1959), wherein a female subject has her face scalped off. Hawkins uses the contentious issue of wartime French-German collaborations as a means of fleshing out a better context for the film’s focus on what makes the *vrai visage*.

In postwar France, as well, bad memories of the war and of patriarchal guilt were initially exercised by (temporarily) destroying the looks of women [...] In a sense, French guilt over all French collaboration was initially mapped onto women’s bodies, and it was women who bore the brunt of the punishment for most of the quotidian traffic in German commerce. [...] In that sense, shaved postwar French women stood in for *all* French collaborators, and their temporary disfigurement served to cover over or mask some of the wider crimes and guilt of the patriarchal homeland. (71)

While this would be an excellent context to investigate/invaginate extreme performance artist Orlan's own skin-grafting performances, it is also a way of understanding how the relationship between French and German has been historically literally marked on the skin. This is of interest to me as another opportunity for anecdotal theory. I have been dangerously collaborating, mixing German (descent) with French (theories). Most interesting is that in both a return and a reversal this collaboration will be mapped onto my skin via the tattooed signature; the temporary disfigurement of being 'shaved' only further revealing the wider crimes of contextual closeness I have committed with/in the name of another with the hands of others.

By the multiplicity of signatures, here, tracing over Derrida's signature, collected under the signature countersigned by many, the text remains "open" – a point that is nicely literalized by its private location. As Bennington notes, "for to make one's text absolutely proper to oneself, absolutely idiomatic, would be to bar all reading of it, even by oneself, and so the totally signed text, proper to its signatory, appropriated by him, would no longer be a text" (163). The self-reflexivity of this text contaminates all signatures attached to it; more to the point, it actively augments the always already contaminated nature of the signature.

Fogel and Connolly's tracings of Derrida's signature, which are countersignatures to Derrida's, to my project, to my own, will in turn be countersigned by the tattooing and by me reading. It will be their signing, but not their 'own' signatures; revealing the two-way directionality of contamination. Not only have they contaminated Derrida's by

counterfeit signing, but contaminated their own signature by having signed that which is not consistent with their own. It both is and isn't their signature. It is a good example of what Jane Marie Todd describes as "[t]he outside is brought inside, the signature placed in the text, the reader's identity blurred with the author's, and genre definitions transgressed in the process" (18).

This text which will have been submitted to the department in the morning – marking the time of day I have always started writing this thesis – will also be a work of mourning. It is a work of mourning for the way in which it remembers and memorializes the other, not just Derrida or the signature, but Fogel and Connolly; those who have helped with the text are also implicated and incorporated into the text and onto my body. The tattoo (l)inks us together, a Barthesian souvenir: "Happy and/or tormenting remembrance of an object, a gesture, a scene, linked to the loved being and marked by the intrusion of the imperfect tense into the grammar of the lover's discourse" (216). Stan Persky in Autobiography of a Tattoo also frames his tattoo in terms of memory:

The tattoo came not at the beginning, when most sailors get them, as a promise or a vow of things to come, a hopeful boast of manhood, but at the end – of my 'tour of duty,' of an initiatory education in desire, art, the world – as a document, testimony, as a vow of *memory*. (205)

Persky's vow of memory recalls here Bennington who writes on remembering names:

we shall say that this indebtedness (let's call it friendship) is grounded in a certainty underlying any encounter, namely that one of us will die before the



other, will in some sense see the other die, will survive the other, and will therefore live *in memory of the other*, wearing the other's mourning, like it or not.

(166)

One debt (among the many) I owe is for that first encounter with Derrida, which seems to underlie any encounter I have; to the work which is now, all, in part, a part of my work; it will now always already be a mourning of the one *in* the other. And, as Bennington puts it, I will 'wear,' rather than bear, the mark quite literally; the tattoo will be living in the memory of the other, a wearing of the other's mourning, and mourning of the other. The tattooed signature will be a trace of Derrida, Fogel and Connolly, a trace of their tracings.

This textual closeness, perhaps already too uncomfortable for some academics, will only be further perverted by the location of the signature on my body. It might be more apt to call this a transgressive act of *cuntextual* closeness.

### *Derriddling; or, Getting Off (On) Derrida*

Continuing the punning linguistics of "derridadaism," "derridoodling," and "derridraw," I introduce "derriddling."

The specific placement of the tattoo is strategic to my methodology; as a veiled return to context, to *cuntext*. I am not suggesting that context should be figured as something absolute, determinate, but rather as a means of further complicating the (im)possibilities of meaning(s). While it is a place of origins, it also isn't; for example, as explained

earlier, Blake's buttocks and Bersani's reading of Genet present a redefining and a reversing of archetypes with figures of the fertile anus.

Obviously my potty mouth prose owes a lot to Jane Gallop, who, in The Daughter's Seduction, brazenly calls Lacan a "prick" (36), a "floozy"(42); she also coins the impressive term "cuntamination" (84). And yet, Gallop's most famous contextualization comes in "The Liberated Woman" when she admits to having masturbated to Sade (97). And, to put this anecdote in context, Gallop's masturbation recalls the master masturbator, Rousseau, and like Rousseau, Gallop has, though for different reasons – namely French-kissing a graduate student in front of the class – become the name of a problem, at least from the vantage point of academe. And yet, as the 1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue reveals, "academy" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was slang for a brothel. Gallop is out of context; holding untimely orifice hours.

Still, it would be more apt to see context as cunttext, remembering the cunt's relationship with fluids and erotics. The tattoo's erogenous placement can be traced back to Plato's Phaedrus in terms of the erotic connection between the body and writing. Peters, who reads the Phaedrus as a critique of media that reveals our prevalent anxiety over communication, suggests that "On discovering that he has the text of the speech tucked inside his tunic, Socrates loses interest in Phaedrus's version when he can have 'Lysias himself.' Here, already, the written word is figured as an erotic object, concealed close to the body" (39). It is the location of this close relation that we might call context, and its location undeniably factors into the eroticizing of the written word. As such, considering

context's important role in *tainting* the written word (not determining it), that deconstruction critique can continue to sweep it aside is to reveal its own current sterile methodology. So, perhaps, to see it as *cuntext* we might be able reconsider the ways context problematizes, makes messier rather than clearer. It certainly has been identified as the "name of a problem" by Derrida, so rather than leave it alone we should critically diddle it more.

Juliet Fleming uses Kristeva's work on the abject and its liminality to frame the tattoo as "a boundary phenomenon"; one that is neither "inside nor outside" but "[l]odged on the *border* between inside and outside" occupying the "no-place of abjection" (64, emphasis mine). Fleming expands the psychic liminality of abjection, describing it as that which is on the border between symptom-expression and repression, making a parallel between the physical and psychological in terms of their location topography:

This interim position between symptom production and sublimation is one that is attributed to the tattoo when it is understood as a self-inflicted wound – at once a mark that abjects the bearer, and an assertion of control over abjection. (64)

Both in terms of physical and psychological manifestations of the abject, it is a border phenomenon. And, it is its inside/outside location that lends itself to Derrida's discussion of the hymen and invagination, as well as offers an explanation of my methodology throughout this entire thesis. For Derrida the hymen is a "sign of fusion" (Dissemination 209), one on which "so many bodily metaphors are written" (213), and invagination is "through which the trait of the first line, the borderline, splits while remaining the same

and traverses yet also bounds the corpus” (“Law” 217). This text is a hymen and is made up of hymens – threads opened, frayed and interwoven.

Bound to the invagination is the “yes, yes” of the signature in general, and a particularly nervy location on my body. As the signature connects, as shown earlier with Blake, with death and sex via *le petit mort*, so too does the signature connect via its “yes, yes” with the orgasm. Derrida admits “we must write, we must sign, we must bring about new events with untranslatable marks – and this is the frantic call, the distress of a signature that is asking for a *yes* from the other, the pleading injunction for a counter-signature” (“Ulysses Gramophone” 282-3). This frantic, pleading, asking for a *yes*, is an aroused rhetoric, revealing a critical ache. Although it is less obvious than Gallop’s French-kiss, it still reveals an erotic economy whereby, as Richard Burt and Jeffrey Wallen note, “the legal subject (one who can give consent) is equated with the sexual subject, and also with the pedagogical subject (the student)” (75). This economy which links legal, sexual, and pedagogical together is particularly interesting to my current investigation/invagination of the Derridean signature – and the way in which this economy is also already operating within the signature itself. Lucy notes, “a signature is not reducible to a proper name, for Derrida; it marks something like the idiosyncratic or singular ‘weave’ of a text or a writer’s ‘style’” (166).

My own signature then will have been the signature, the weaving – sometimes recklessly, often erotically – within and between texts, this weaving marking my idiosyncratic ‘weave’ of this text. I am incessantly, intimately, *incessantly* concerned with questions of

the signature, of my *stain urge*, which are one and the same. Burt and Wallen note that “A haven of theory makes it safe to get off on figures of sex” (78), to which I would add “as well as to get off on the sexing of figures.”

### *Cuntfessions*

*If our reader is now confused by our wanderings,  
she can consider herself in good company*  
–Gallop Seduction 107

Now to admit what I have been doing all along...without saying too much. Much to your frustration (?) I haven't broken (m)any laws; I have been following the law of law of genre, “a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy” (Derrida “Law” 206). I have mixed theories and periods, ink and blood, swapped signatures, abstract and literal, even waxed soft-pornographically on academic bodies otherwise off limits. I do not have to pick any one or any other, since as Derrida says,

if an assured and guaranteed decision is impossible, this is because there is nothing more to be done than to commit oneself, to perform, to wager, to allow chance its chance – to make a decision that is essentially edgeless bordering perhaps only on madness. (218)

By mixing rather than picking, my methodology attempts to perform this essentially edgeless bordering on madness through weaving in such a manner that it may be “impossible to decide whether an event, account, account of event or event of accounting took place” (218). This heuristic method is a whoreistic one. Even David Simpson reveals a limitation of picking one approach, even the Derridean approach, to textual

analysis, namely the idea that there is nothing outside of the text. For Simpson, “Derrida and many of his disciples seem to offer precious little in the way of incentives to move the analysis beyond the surface of the text, back into the historical powers that constitute its play” (23-4). While Simpson is on the right track here, his use of the word ‘constitute’ is somewhat misguided. It is not that a historical context necessarily *constitutes* (for that would be too reductive, authoritative, and simplistic), but that such a context offers more material for play to play with; context necessarily contaminates. And, this Derridean desire to eliminate context from play suggests to me that it is still anxious about transgressive methodologies. Simpson offers an example of when an insulated textual analysis is not enough:

In particular, Blake and many of his contemporaries write a language through which a highly sophisticated political energy may be discovered to be latent, and occasionally obvious. The recovery of this energy of course takes *research*, in the old-fashioned sense; it cannot be expected to emanate from a mere exercise in “reading the poem,” however ingenious. (24)

I have throughout my writing, here, attempted to do both: ingenious poetic exercising and research. No doubt, Mann would find this not ingenious but stupid:

The spectacle of the masocritic trying to give stupidity its due while thinking it through with all the proper rigor, using it to judge himself judging, to judge judgment itself, humiliating himself, elaborating his own discourse as the vehicle of a death that is anything but heroic or sublime: let us take this as the true spectacle of criticism. (137)

Certainly, I am a “masocritic,” having been told that I am embarrassing to read, and also in the way in which I will have made, and continue to make, excremental spectacles – product(ions) of textual waste. The (w)hole time I have been (t)here, my writings have been (be)coming as Gallop’s, “more vulgar, more vulvar” (Seduction 31). And of course, I am a masocritic for the way in which I will have literally made this criticism hurt by physically, perversely, mixing ink and blood in the tattoo. This co-mixing of fluids complements the co-mixing of genres and figures, as well as my often comix-ing treatment of subject matter. As Jeff Noonan notes, “[t]here is no essential, appropriate context that would distinguish proper from parasitical or metaphorical meaning” (38). Noonan hits the mark, but even more to the point is why context would be thought of as anything but these two complicating, destabilizing factors. Why wouldn’t context, as thought of as a sort of loose bundle of threads/knots, appeal to a heuristic, deconstructive, playful methodology? As Derrida himself says, “a context is never absolutely determinable [...] its determination is never certain or saturated” (“Signature” 310). It is because of its “never absolutely determinable” consistency that context – better thought of as cuntext for its fluidity– should play into deconstructive readings, further expanding the surface space for playful line work, and offering a depth of more possible factors, more fibres to play with – ultimately injecting figures such as the signature with more vulgar bulgar.

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