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**APOCALYPSE AND RECUPERATION: BLAKE AND THE MAW OF COMMERCE**

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## ABSTRACT

The paper is a "materialist" reading of Blake's illuminated works. It examines the copperplate method itself as the main theme of Blake's work, and also as a potentially practical means of conveying Blake's art to its intended audience. The question of audience must be at the center of any avowedly prophetic project. Did Blakean production actually facilitate reception? Are we the audience it sought? What forms of supplementary reproduction are necessary for modern discourse on Blake, and what are the effects of such mediation? To what extent does reproduction undermine, sublate, cancel or recuperate Blakean priorities even as it seeks to represent them? What do we actually read when we read a reproduction? The paper also thinks through the Blakean problem to a broader consideration of artistic projects operating marginally to the predominant cultural economy, and of their relation to criticism.

APOCALYPSE AND RECUPERATION: BLAKE AND THE MAW OF COMMERCE

Paul Mann

Reengravd Time after Time  
Ever in their Youthful prime  
My Designs unchangd remain  
Time may rage but rage in vain  
For above Times troubled Fountains  
On the Great Atlantic Mountains  
In my Golden House on high  
There they Shine Eternally

Everything ever published about Blake is true. Not, perhaps, informed, masterful, judicious, cogent, interesting or even necessarily true about Blake, but always true to the material conditions of writing about Blake, always somehow negotiable within the actual economy of that "industry" known as Blake criticism, or criticism, or discourse.

The industry's avowed task of "representing" Blake's truth, often indeed of agreeing with and advocating that truth, is thus mitigated or even undermined by the industry's concomitant need to maintain itself in existence. The consensually validated revelation of Blake's truth would put the industry out of business. Blake's "truth" becomes a currency, a fluctuating exchange-value in an economy whose survival depends not only on agreement but on disagreement, discord, dismissals,

departures, the continual destruction and reconstruction of each appearance of that truth. The rhetorical closure of any given study is belied by the ongoing discursive context which sustains it. The more monumental and definitive a given study, the more new departures it provides for; this is part of its fundamental value. At the same time, dismissals of foolish and misconceived articles are so common in opening paragraphs of successive studies as to suggest that trash can be circulated almost as profitably as so-called major work.

This is not to argue against the discrimination of quality, but the doubleness of this critical production must be noted. All writing about Blake serves to sustain the economy of writing about Blake. But this economy is not the one expressed in Blake's books.

It is not my wish to invoke, yet again, the anti-industrial rhetoric of "mills" et cetera so familiar in Blake and rather ludicrous when advocated by a criticism which appears without the slightest disturbance in industrially-produced commodities (e.g., offset, perfect-bound, mass-printed and marketed books); I do not wish to consign Blake's books to any strictly "textual" meaning. By "Blake's books" I mean the objects actually made by Blake: not editions, not reproductions, not even facsimiles, however exactly conceived. The reason for this distinction, which might seem at first to fetishize those objects, is to pursue, on the most material grounds, an ontology of production, an evaluation of Blake's book dependent upon but not identical to any reading of its text or even of a "composite" of text and pictorial image. I wish to pursue a "third reading": a

materialist reading of the object in terms of its implicit economy, and in relation to another economy which later seeks to represent it.

Were production not thetic in Blake, such a study would have little justification; it would appear reductionist in the extreme. But in Blake's project production is indeed thetic: more than anywhere else in literature, the distinction between production and product, or between "conception and execution" in Blake's even more active terms, or between the semiotic and symbolic modalities, to appropriate terms from Kristeva<sup>1</sup> -- more than anywhere else in literature, in Blake such distinctions are collapsed. We are confronted not only with the production of meaning but with production as meaning. Erdman has remarked upon Blake's "workshop symbolism" but such symbolism is not just seeded here and there throughout the work, like little reflexive signposts to remind us, in the midst of our more cosmic contemplations, that what we are reading is an art(e)fact. Since the primary function of Blake's book is to (re)present or rather to embody imaginative activity, the "Poetic Genius" in all its dimensions and operations, then that "symbolism" of the workshop may be said to exhaust the text, to contain all its force. These are the very pages on which the artist labored, the whole book is a presented workshop. The "meaning" of any Blake book is thus, first and foremost, that Blake made it, and made it this way, not just textually, not even only as a composite art, but fully, materially, as "Itself & Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else" (E 783).

## 1. Production

In Blake's project the unity of soul and body is not a strictly spiritual axiom; obviously it must be physical as well. By the same token, since the generation of divided forms is one of the most fundamental episodes in the plot of the fallen world, the work of art cannot be merely text, nor even merely illustrated text; it must be the complete "marriage" of poetic and graphic processes, pictorial writing and graphic pictures. Moreover, the manifestations of this marriage must be specific and non-generalizable events -- say, nine specific books sharing the name and other family traits of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. In the book, spiritual form is in no respect distinct from the body, in no respect apothetic but fully immanent in a material form, a body thereby itself rendered spiritual.

Blake's book is a Work in both the nominative and verbal senses. Barthes' distinction between Work and Text is pertinent here, and perhaps too as an instance of the difficulty which any criticism, however nouveau, will have in treating Blake's book. The "work is concrete, occupying a portion of book-space (in a library, for example); the Text, on the other hand, is a methodological field. . . . While the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language: it exists only in discourse."<sup>2</sup> If the Text is a general methodological field of and for discourse, Blake's Work is a specific methodological field of and for the labor that produced it. It is, so to speak, labor-intensive, intending the manifestation of its own labor and

maximizing the evidence of that labor wherever possible — precisely the opposite of Yeatsian labor, whose goal is to conceal itself even in poems where it describes itself (viz. "Adam's Curse"). The boundary between such a work and any ensuing (textual) discourse is clearly marked and unusually abrupt; the work aims no further than its page. It is peculiarly and incorrigibly autotelic.

Autotelism is, of course, problematic for an avowedly prophetic project. I would argue that this problematic is realized by Blake and articulated, for example, in America's copy-occasional passage in which the stern Bard breaks his harp (2:18-21, E52) and more fully in The Book of Urizen's extensive deconstruction of uniqueness. But the work's aversion to "imposition" and its attraction to parables suggest that its prophecy will be more emblematic than descriptive, that prophecy is more a matter of exemplifying imaginative activity than of representing any external contents. The prophetic "message" is held in a "text" (however the message is construed, however text is defined) which is itself held in a mode of production whose abiding telos is to manifest itself as such — to be rather than to represent Poetic Genius.

For Morris Eaves, this aesthetic is a radical version of "Romantic expressive theory," in which "the artist is the thing expressed," the work's whole purpose is to express the "character" of the artist.<sup>3</sup> Artist and artwork constitute an equation of rigorous identity:  $A = A$ . But the language of expression and the language of identity are not, perhaps, so easily reconciled, for in expression there is also a

question of origin, of priority: Eaves's artist expressing himself is an artist depositing in the work traces of a "character" which precedes and overrides the work, stands behind it and is therefore always to some degree absent from it. In a theory of radical identity, on the other hand, the artist would be precisely the thing expressed; he would be absolutely congruent and coterminous with the work. The artist does not express a precedent self by some projective representation of psychic contents, rather he creates himself as artist only in making the work. The artist is the art, not the source of the art, not its deistic origin; the artist is that being who is active in the pulsation of the art-ery only at the moment he is active there. L'écriture, c'est moi: I am not a writer (an antecedent producer of texts), "I" am writing (production itself); whatever can be called "I" by the imagination is (in) the work itself. There is no artistic self prior to the active creative moment; by definition nothing of this figure is or can be left out of the work. Anything left over is selfhood and imaginatively excluded, that is to say, annihilated.

Thus an ordinary statement such as Eaves's "Blake begins Jerusalem with an address 'To the Public' . . ." (187) inscribes a fallen relationship even as it attempts to describe an imaginative act. A biographical subject commences a poetic object; but this subject-object relationship is precisely what the theory is said to belie. The theory must state that "Blake" begins in or with the first line of Jerusalem; before that, strictly speaking, the artist was Milton or some other work. The signature "Blake" on all the works is theoretically merely

the name of the continuity of the series, a composite identity rather than the trace of an absent origin. The artist's (divine) hand labors intensively to create an icon of absolute immanence; an emanation which is its own name;<sup>4</sup> an autograph like the famous Escher drawing of two hands drawing each other, but without any doubleness, and without an Escher behind both; a radical aseity ontologically prior to and, as we shall see, ultimately obstructing any other representation; a "print" -- in the forensic as well as the graphic sense -- which is completely identified and will tolerate no other mark, no other print or signature, no trace of the identity of any other individual or machine on its surface.<sup>5</sup>

Some attention is paid to Blake's production-aesthetic by nearly every study, in part because the illuminated books are so physically peculiar that their peculiarity cannot be ignored; in part because this peculiarity is also negotiable, a special value, a kind of "extra" which can be used to enrich the artist's reputation and therefore also, with little or no cynicism, his broker-interpreter; in part because the text openly describes this aesthetic, insists that it is crucial to its meaning, continually links conception and execution. For the most part, however, these studies have taken the production-aesthetic at face value, assuming that Blake's rhetoric about his method fully describes his method, and have used this rhetoric to support readings which continue to privilege the book's textuality. Historical studies of Blake's production techniques, like those published by Essick, tend to be seen as valuable source material for the main business of the

literary interpretation of a text which can, after all, be printed in virtually any form; such studies are not seen as valid modes of interpretation in their own right.

But in addition to all the other available forms of commentary, we need a theory of the book, of this production-aesthetic, which does not subordinate production to any transcendental textual form; and we need a theory of Blakean production which does not restrict itself to the task of representing Blake's own theory of production. For there is, in the book, a profound tension between the autotelic and the instrumental, between the intransitive and the transitive, between insemination and dissemination, between production and distribution. The Blakean theory of production and the theory of Blakean production are not the same theory; their difference begins in their relative conceptions of Audience.

## 2. Audience

The question of audience is the most egregiously underasked question in Blake studies. There are, to be sure, continual references to a reader whose faculties are roused to visionary activity by Blake's subversive narrative strategies, to a reader who responds to Blake's self-presentation with love and friendship, and so on.<sup>6</sup> The terms in which critics describe such readers are taken largely from the text itself: Blake's text is constantly referring to its readers, telling them how and how not to read, leading and misleading them, exhorting ("Mark well

my words! they are of your eternal salvation," Milton), needling, browbeating, cajoling, seducing them.

There is, in the text, a continuity of passages bridging Blake's idea of the book and his idea of audience. Morris Eaves's William Blake's Theory of Art, for instance, rides this citational track from "Artists" to "Works" to "Audience" — the book's main chapter titles — quite persuasively, as if there were no break between production and reception, as if the intentional flow of citations represented an actual state of facts. But in fact the break between production and reception is severe. The rhetoric of production is embodied in the very objects it announces; on the other hand, it is difficult to substantiate any material connection between the ideal reader announced in the text and the audience it manages to reach, indeed, materially enables itself to reach. Eaves bridges the gap by acting as if the voluminously implied reader and the actual reader are one and the same person, and both are Morris Eaves — which is by no means to single Eaves out for special criticism, since it is entirely characteristic of Blake studies in general to assume that we are the future generation to which the sublime allegory is addressed, that in some sense Blake's prophecy is fulfilled by the fact of our reading.

But whereas another sort of criticism faced with another sort of text might comfortably investigate an implied reader whose function is to help the author sustain the discourse, here we might ask whether this fictive internalized reader is in some part the figure of the author's alienation from any actual audience; we might ask pointedly

whether this reader is implied because Blake is in no position to make her explicit, whether audience becomes fictive when it is only in fiction that the author can determine it at all. If, in other words, Blake's prophecy is indeed addressed to us, how precisely did it plan to reach us?

The copperplate method developed rapidly from its rough beginnings in the neo-emblem books of the three early tractates (1788?) to The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790-93). The Marriage constitutes one kind of apex to Blake's career, even though his graphic and poetic development continued thereafter, for we find in this work the convergence of several peak enthusiasms: optimism about that particular revolutionary moment in European history and its apocalyptic resonances; optimism about the human body and the spiritual potential of improvements in its sensual enjoyments; and optimism about the capacity of his copperplate method to contribute to both. The copperplate method not only offered an artistic format worthy of Blake's "message" but a format which seemed eminently capable of delivering that message to its intended audience. The ecstatic language of soul-body unification in The Marriage is even more animated by this material confluence of form and content than is ordinarily credited. Especially when read against the backdrop of the 1793 Prospectus (E692-93), we sense Blake's confidence that The Marriage and the works around it are not only visionary delights but entirely practical, breakthrough pieces of book-making as well. What prior artists lacked were the physical means of making themselves available

to the public; Blake had discovered such means, and could produce his work at "less than one fourth the expense" that one might expect. Moreover, The Marriage directed itself not just to some vaguely defined general public but to a very specific and accessible audience -- the left-liberal circle around the bookseller Joseph Johnson, for instance.<sup>7</sup> Blake seemed to believe, in short, that he had not only developed a prophetic message and invented an aesthetically appropriate form for its expression, but that this form would be appropriate for conveying it to its specific target audience in the most effective manner.

There is, however, no record of Johnson's ever having sold or carried any copies of The Marriage (the Prospectus implies that Blake remained the sole outlet), nor that Priestley or Paine or most of its other implied readers ever read, purchased, or even saw it. The reasons for Blake's apparent failure to reach his desired audience are complex, and no doubt not entirely explicable, but they must include the fact that the radical coterie which Blake targeted was still situated and defined within a distinctly bourgeois marketplace. Essick argues that Blake's graphic style ran largely counter to the predominant tastes of the age (whatever their holders' religious and political biases), and Eaves has convincingly shown that the styles represented by those popular tastes were intimately bound up with the machinery and therefore the economy which produced them.<sup>8</sup> For the most part, the reader Blake thought he had targeted did not exist, and the readers who did exist did so within a complex of cultural and

industrial parameters which Blake's mode of self-publishing could not breach. Blake's technology developed no independent, economic base, no "connexions & . . . method of managing" (E726). It fell into the cracks between various sectors of the eighteenth-century publishing and art markets; it was meant to bridge an aesthetic gap no one else saw; it supplied an imaginary demand ("which the world shall have whether they will or no," E44). Blake's project attempted to accommodate itself to an idea of audience without fully grasping the context within which any contemporary audience truly operated; as, one hates to admit, a modern market analyst could readily have indicated.

Like any artist, Blake is firmly rooted in his age. He took his intellectual and technical materials from contemporary discourse and revised them radically to suit his own needs, but in the end that revision was so radical as to make it impossible for him to return his work to his milieu. There was a "corporate author" behind Blake's project, which fed themes and images into his text and which he assumed he was actually addressing -- "the urban sub-class which emerged through opposition to Britain's national policy" in the early 1790s<sup>9</sup> -- but there is no corporate author beyond it to mediate its reentry into society. For literature is a social institution not only in matters of composition -- in a work's catalogue of influences -- but in all phases of production. The same private technologies which the Prospectus claims will deliver the artist from his perennial poverty and obscurity turn out, in the long run, to have consigned him to it; freed of the machinery of production, Blake unintentionally and ironically freed

himself of the audience in its custody.<sup>10</sup>

Audience is precisely a mediated term. In capitalist societies, at least, the author has little or no direct access to audience because "author" is a collective, collaborative, institutional term. As James Thorpe indicates:

Various forces are always at work thwarting or modifying the author's intentions. The process of preparing the work for dissemination to a public (whether that process leads to publication in printed form or production in the theatre or preparation of scribal copies) puts the work in the hands of people who are professionals in the execution of the process. . . . The work of art is thus always tending toward a collaborative status. . . .<sup>11</sup>

The very forces which an author might resist as "thwarting or modifying" her intentions are also those which enable her work to see the light of day. Authorship itself, as Jerome J. McGann comments, is a social nexus, not a personal possession; and if the authority for specific literary works is initiated anew for each new work by some specific artist, its initiation takes place in a necessary and integral historical environment of great complexity. Most immediately . . . it takes place within the accepted conventions and enabling limits established by the institutions of literary production -- conventions and limits which exist for the purpose of generating and supporting literary production.<sup>12</sup>

Blake's main error, in other words, was to assume that his ability to produce his work in entirely distinctive material forms would grant him unmediated access to his desired audience; as it turned out, to liberate oneself from the social machinery of production was to liberate oneself from the audience which was also its production (and its producer).

We are not dealing simply with the customary difficulty of any "avant-garde" or "prophetic" or "radical," as you will, artistic project to maintain itself indefinitely along the cultural margin. To borrow categories from Terry Eagleton, while various literary modes of production can coexist whatever their ideological differences -- novels can be mass-produced on gigantic machinery or mimeographed and distributed by hand from streetcorners -- certain modes will be favored by the general economy, and no literary mode of production can survive for very long if it is in direct conflict with the general mode of production.<sup>13</sup> Historically, therefore, marginal cultural projects without strong independent patronage either fade rapidly or are recuperated, and thereby transformed, by the general mode of production, and there is no reason to expect Blake's case to have been any different. Except that in Blake's case the mode of production carried so much aesthetic, moral and ontological weight. The goal of the production-aesthetic was to embody itself (in books) in an exemplary (i.e. prophetic) manner, but it was the very form of this embodiment which situated it on a cultural margin from which it could not by itself be exemplary. And yet it is only by itself that the work

is itself. Its proper mode of revelation conceals it from its proper audience. This dilemma was not, of course, intentional: the evidence of letters and notebook entries demonstrates conclusively that Blake consciously desired and believed he actively sought a fair, fit audience. Nor would anyone any longer wish to chastise Blake in some Hayleyesque manner for not having been more conciliatory to contemporary tastes. But his desires for audience and his means for reaching it -- desires and means which had originally appeared to be in such revolutionary accord -- turn out to have been in direct conflict. The situation is rather more complicated than that prophets tend to be ignored in their own times, however appealing that justification might be to us, as it manifestly was to Blake.

In this light, the creative scope of the later work seems even more astonishing. There is a kind of inverse proportion between the ambition manifested in a given work and the number of copies produced: as the former increases, the latter decreases. It is further remarkable that the later work addresses itself ever more stridently to an (increasingly more generalized) implied reader. In Jerusalem -- Blake's most ambitious copperplate work, extant in only five copies and only one of those fully colored -- he makes his broadest addresses to the "Reader! [lover] of books!" (E145), to the "Jews," "Deists," "Christians," "To the Public." Can the absurdity of these confident addresses have been lost on him? Could it have escaped him, even as he printed these final books, that the very idiosyncrasy of his project, so crucial to its production-aesthetic, was a form of economic aphasia

that had long since rendered this audience unthinkable? There is certainly something very moving about his stubborn insistence on his imaginative rights, something heroic about his overwhelming persistence in his folly. There is also, one risks saying, something rather desperately silly about it; as one critic has remarked of characters in Beckett's plays, "nothing is funnier than totally unjustified total confidence."<sup>14</sup> The attacks on the industrial economy which Blake believes has betrayed him also escalate at this stage:

Englishmen rouse yourselves from the fatal Slumber into which  
 Booksellers & Trading Dealers have thrown you Under the  
 artfully propagated pretence that a Translation or a Copy of  
 any kind can be as honourable to a Nation as An Original. . . .  
 No Man Can Improve An Original Invention

(E576)

The passage is from a text which editors have pasted together from a scattering of programmatic and vituperative scrawls in Blake's private Notebook, and dubbed "[Public Address]."

### 3. Value

This "Translation" involves a shift of the ground of the work's semiotic modality from the production-aesthetic to an economy based on exchange-value: that is to say, the economy. One of the meanings of exchange-value is that the worth of any given object must be something external to the object (if the object contained the form of its value

it could not be exchanged for it) and with which the object is intermeasurable. As Marx wrote, "The whole mystery of the form of value lies hidden in this elementary form:"

x commodity A = y commodity B, or

x commodity A is worth y commodity B.

"It is not possible to express the value of linen in linen. 20 yards of linen = 20 yards of linen is not an expression of value."<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, it is an expression of identity, precisely the equation we have already encountered in the form  $A = A$ , artist = artwork. In economic terms, this equation is a short circuit, one which would bind the value of the object to its source and prohibit its entry into the market. In other words, despite the apparent public potential of Blakean technology, and despite the artist's avowed desire for an audience and for the living wage he thought he deserved, the production-aesthetic itself disrupts this intentionality of value at its most basic level. An economy is a system of exchange, of the mediation of value, of intermeasurability; Blake's production-aesthetic explicitly rejects the notions of mediation, exchange-value and intermeasurability. The ideology of Identity is precisely anti-economic and undercuts any wish expressed in the text for its transmission to an audience.

But this is also to imply that, on another level, conception and execution, the artist and the work, are not united, that they have quite distinct and often conflicting desires, ideas, teleologies. In Blake's very attempt to manifest nothing in his work but his self-

identical imagination something else is inevitably expressed, released; another identity is set in motion even though generations must pass before that element can be clarified. It is an element we will describe as "aura," as "fetish," as "supplement." It is set in motion because, as Marx insisted,

everything, commodity or not, is convertible into money.

Everything becomes saleable and purchaseable. Circulation becomes the great social retort into which everything is thrown, to come out again as the money crystal. Nothing is immune from this alchemy, the bones of the saints cannot withstand it, let alone more delicate res sacrosanctae, extra commercium hominum.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. Transcendental Editing

There has long been a tendency in Shakespeare studies to read the plays not as "texts" but in terms of performance; recently this trend has begun to employ a critique of editing. According to Michael Warren, for instance, traditional editorial collations of the folio and quarto versions of King Lear have the effect of obliterating performance differences -- obliterating, in other words, the play's proper artistic context.<sup>17</sup> (Randall McLeod calls this practice "anaesthetic.") Editions replace the performance situation with a kind of metatext which, by a curious but familiar logic, also poses as an archetext, in some ways closer to the author's (presumably unitary)

"intentions" than the published versions of his own era. In response to this situation, a critic like McLeod is liable to claim that he does not believe in editing at all, that technical advances in image-reproduction have made access to the original versions much more feasible and the edition thereby superfluous, if not intolerable.<sup>18</sup>

The situation is different in Blake studies, where the peculiarity of the "originals" has from the outset mandated experiments in image-reproduction; Essick traces the first facsimile back to 1868.<sup>19</sup> It is nonetheless the case that for a long time the pictorial image has remained subordinate to textual editions in Blake studies. The recent shift to a "composite art" perspective has forced many of those who still habitually privilege the text to accommodate their position to the pictorial image, but this movement has not yet gone far enough. We find, for example, that composite art studies tend to discuss words and pictures but not words as pictures, nor the "grammar and syntax" of Blake's pictorial "language," and as a result numerous key effects are regularly overlooked.<sup>20</sup> The edition is no mere matter of convenience (or inconvenience): like Blake's art itself, it is a way of seeing and therefore of conceiving; it is the result of a procedure which actively deontologizes the work, dematerializes it and reconstitutes it as a text. Editing is a profound exercise of cultural power and in respect to Blake it has, to date, been largely successful; indeed, one of the most striking things signified by the edition is that power, that success. I have participated elsewhere in an extended critique of the editorial contamination of Blake's books, and in that

essay it was suggested that photography and other forms of image-reproduction were an answer to the problem of representing Blake's work.<sup>21</sup> Image-reproduction seems more direct and neutral, somehow less mediated: it shows us the line. It is therefore rather easy to assume that image-reproduction is transparent, that it has no distinct ontology, that it is so clearly defined that it signifies Blake's image and no other thing.

What Jerusalem prophesies first and foremost is its own existence as a particular form of labor; by highlighting the fact of its labor in so radical a manner, by making production its primary signified, Blake's work forces any technology which comes into contact with it to highlight its own labor as well, to signify itself whether or not it is ordinarily inclined to do so. The production-aesthetic makes it impossible for any reproduction to pose as a pure mediation. Indeed, as we shall see, the more successful the reproduction is in copying the image, the more its difference from the image is exposed. As Blake's books formalize the labor that produces them, they deformatize their relation with the surrounding economy, a relation most other works of art conceal by merely presupposing it. Thus Blakean production also forces us to witness the tacit economy of reproduction. For more than anything else, reproduction is the recuperation of Blakean work into that economy, the successful transformation of (the) work itself into a commodity.

## 5. Copy

The more a product, any product, looks like its predecessors,  
the less work appears to have gone into it.

(Ron Silliman)<sup>22</sup>

Blake's production-aesthetic is labor-intensive in order to maximize the presence of the artist; individual identity is maximized even at the level of the copy. But the very notion of copy difference is misleading. The term "copy" makes little sense here because the production-aesthetic is anti-mimetic at every turn: the books are not copies of anything, there is no "original" behind them. This is not to deny the obvious consistency of text and image in any given pressrun of a given plate: the books hold "texts" in common but it is the very transcendentalism of textuality against which the production-aesthetic labors; there is an engraved image in common but strictly speaking the copperplate is only the first of a series of surfaces on which Blake worked. The copperplate is not a transcendental but a purely transitive and operational form, a form in the printer's rather than the platonic sense, a means of production. Any attempt to conceive the various instances of a given title as representations of some central (immutable, absent) "original" contradicts the production-aesthetic's insistence on immanence, its vehement counter-transcendental force.

Erdman's Illuminated Blake collects plates from various copies of each title, collates them, and prints them in black and white. Justification for such a procedure is apparently facilitated by Blake's

own consistent privileging of line over color, but such a justification misapplies Blake's rhetoric. The virtue of line is its clarity, not its reproducibility; the common-denominator image one encounters in The Illuminated Blake exists nowhere in the copperplate canon. In describing his enterprise, Erdman projects a familiar if never fully explicit view in which the copperplate is indeed the original (faute de mieux?) and this reproduction, by bizarre implication, its closest approximation, a naked representation stripped of all "accidentals":

Monotony Blake loathed, and when we consider how much variety he introduced into the printing and painting of his work, how distinctive each copy is in coloring and in the finishing of his details, it is surprising how few truly variant details are to be found . . . . The variants that do exist are often extremely interesting, but it is important, if sometimes difficult, to distinguish them from more or less accidental ones.<sup>23</sup>

It is editorial theory, not Blake, that provides the functional dichotomy of substantives and accidentals which validates these reproductions. A given feature is accidental only in respect to the mode of reproduction; in the illuminated book itself no such distinction is even remotely at issue. Blake makes it quite clear that these deceptively Aristotelian categories have no bearing on his work:

nothing new occurs in identical existence; Accident ever varies, Substance can never suffer change or decay

Variety does not necessarily suppose deformity. for a  
rose & a lilly. are various. & both beautiful

Beauty is exuberant but not of ugliness but of beauty & if  
ugliness is adjoined to beauty it is not the exuberance of  
beauty. so if Rafael is hard & dry it is not his genius but  
an accident acquired for now can Substance & Accident be  
predicated of the same Essence! I cannot concieve

But the substance gives tincture to the accident & makes  
it physiognomic

(Anno. Lavater, E595-96)

Minute Discrimination is Not Accidental All Sublimity is  
founded on Minute Discrimination

(Anno. Reynolds, E643)

In an odd way, the production-aesthetic renders variants or accidentals  
supersubstantive, for they are the primary agents of the "copy's"  
differential identification. But by conceiving the instances of a  
given title as copies and their variants as accidentals -- as problems  
to be solved in representation, that is, as problems of representation  
-- editing and reproduction legitimize their very existence: they  
devise a history in which their own reproductions are merely the latest  
in a series of reproductions begun by Blake; with an all-too-familiar  
circularity, they create the Blake who will validate their project.  
Whether variance is marked or minimal is not even an issue. The  
overview required to discuss variance at all is at odds with the  
economy of one-reader-one-book implicit in the production-aesthetic.

## 6. Color

deduct from a rose its redness, from a lilly its whiteness  
 . . . & then we shall return to Chaos & God will be compelld  
 to be Excentric if he Creates O happy Philosopher  
 (E595)

The privileging of line over color should always be seen in the context of Blake's ongoing critique of contemporary and historical graphic styles. His argument is not against color per se but against its abuse by certain artists to usurp line: like Satan driving Palamabron's chariot, color takes on a task for which it was never qualified. That task is, again, one of identification: the purpose of line is to mark character, to delineate one being from another (E550). Rembrandt puts shade over outline: shade obscures outline: outline is identity: ergo, identity is obscured. The entire argument is a defense of drawing. But its stridency has made it difficult to evaluate Blake's own extensive use of color, the reasons for his painstaking and, ultimately, commercially prohibitive painting and/or color-printing of his plates.

One problem with the copperplate method is that the inscription of linear identity does make it reproducible: as in any normative print or book production, the line is more or less constant from one impression to the next; line is the very medium of iterability. Blake surmounts this problem by refusing to rest at the impression, by taking the page itself as a further surface on which to perform autographic

work. It is possible to add or drop or reorder plates, to add or delete textual and pictorial details, but the most striking means for autographing the plate is coloration. No two copies are or can be colored exactly the same (as it turns out, color is also the hardest element to reproduce by manual or mechanical means). I do not mean to infer any conscious analysis on Blake's part of the "problem" of individuating the "copy," let alone an organized defense against future reproductions. It seems much more likely that the extension of work onto the page was virtually automatic, that his imagination moved directly to the printed page as another available and therefore unavoidable arena.

Color has not been slighted by criticism merely because of Blake's argument for line but also because it is the most difficult element of the plate to interpret symbolically: color escapes criticism. It functions almost exclusively in the semiotic modality and primarily in three ways. First, color is a pure exercise of the possibility of color. In a crucial sense these books were colored simply because it was possible to do so; because once the plate was line-printed it remained a ludic surface, a potential field of play; because the hand had not yet exhausted it in printing and in Blake's project everything must be touched by human hands. Second, color individuates the "copy" more than any of its other elements does. In a finely-drawn work color will not usurp line but conform to it: color accepts its subordinacy and works for line in a kind of Blakean ideal of "sexual" harmony: male Los draws the line and female Enitharmon colors it with beams of

blushing love. (The black-and-white reproduction is thus not only "anaesthetic," it is asexual.) Color is an extension of line, and therefore of identity. Third, Blake's programmatic subordination of color to line does not make line a "substantive" and color an "accidental." Color may be "ornamental," as the 1793 Prospectus calls it, but we would be advised to take the word in the specific sense of a contribution to the increased pleasure of both artist and audience. In the early 1790s, Blake believed sensual enjoyment a condition of apocalypse. Any element of pleasure is substantive and its deletion the removal of one of the work's "meanings."

## 7. Hand

Linnell knew who made his Songs but I cannot be sure who made mine. The title page of my copy is crowded, a lengthy dramatis personae: "William Blake" (his "text," his "illustrations"), Sir Geoffrey Keynes (his "commentary"), and someone named The Oxford University Press (a corporate and incorporeal identity, a composite of fractional abilities, part human part machine). Whose hand? The historical bibliography of Blake studies displays a complex genealogy, a proliferation in the book's own space of thumbprints, partial signatures, traces of phantom identities. Nor are all of these signatures as legible as Keynes's or even OUP's, for most have been written in invisible ink: distributors, shop managers, sales personnel, university and other consumers, critics and reviewers:

production identity begins to occupy a space with the dimensions of the whole society. Most of these producers work by means that are so tacit they are invisible even when the signature of their agent is visible: Erdman, for instance, works in part by deletion (collating hybrid copies) and erasure (monochromatization).<sup>24</sup>

Mass-market reproductions like The Illuminated Blake or the Oxford Songs exaggerate their graphic differences from Blake's images; they emphasize their status as mere reproductions of an infinitely greater and unattainable original (such that frustration becomes a central feature of reading: the reproduction is a tease). One might therefore expect that a fine-art reproduction, a facsimile, in its purer and more exact approximations of the physical evidence of Blake's images, would be more silent, transparent, self-effacing, providing an object which at least appears less mediated. But mediation is inevitable: it can be concealed but never eliminated, and the production-aesthetic tends always to force it out of hiding.

The recent publication of the Manchester Etching Workshop's facsimile of seventeen plates from the combined Songs, and a review of the facsimile which Robert N. Essick kindly showed me in typescript, afford me grounds for further discussion. As Essick points out, one of the chief problems for Blake facsimilists has been the difficulty of analytically separating the various layers of production (lines printed from the copperplate and linear or chromatic overlays). The Trianon Press responded to this problem with a sophisticated system of color stencils. The Manchester group cannot be said to have developed a

truly alternate technology since they worked with very special materials, the Victoria and Albert Museum's electrotypes of the sixteen electrotypes that were made for Gilchrist's Life of William Blake (1863); they made relief etchings from these plates and added a title plate of their own devising for Experience. They then printed these plates "on a rolling press with hand-made intaglio ink on dampened wove paper" -- "like Blake." For the facsimile (color) edition (the Workshop also issued a monochrome edition), the "watercolors have been prepared by hand using eighteenth-century recipes, and the coloring is in meticulous imitation of copy B in the British Museum." (All quotations are from the Manchester prospectus.) I have only had an opportunity for a very cursory examination of the facsimile, but Essick confirms my impression that the results are remarkable: the images are not only quite like Blake's but are so, in part, because the methods used to produce them were themselves so close to Blake's. And yet the differences are significant.

Blake prided himself on using "the most beautiful wove paper that could be procured" (E693); the Manchester group too uses beautiful wove paper but, as they advertise, the sheets have also been "watermarked Songs of Innocence or Songs of Experience [and] blind embossed with Blake's own monogram." There are no such impressions on the paper Blake used. Indeed, the special paper is doubly curious since it both marks a kind of production completely absent from Blake's work and seems to have forced the Manchester group to imprint their images more deeply into the paper than Blake did his. Essick indicates that the

very texture of the Manchester paper differs from Blake's, and that commercial papers currently available might have been more conducive to impressions like Blake's. The question then is why the Manchester group chose to depart from Blake at a point where it would have been easiest to follow him; why the workshop created superfluous differences even as they so keenly pursued exact replications. It is Essick's hypothesis that they were "motivated by the Blake Trust facsimiles, with their special paper and monogram, rather than a requirement prompted by Blake's originals." The spirit of competition, then, or something like it, might have inspired the departure. In other words, the Manchester group apparently chose to mark their work with traces of the history of Blake reproductions, and therefore willfully inscribed their work within that history.

"Like all facsimiles," Essick remarks,

the Manchester Songs does not escape a graphic equivalent of the Heisenberg effect: the closer the reproduction approaches one characteristic of Blake's illuminated books, the more it distorts another. Yet some variants are of the very sort we discover by comparing one original impression with another. The leaf or tendril absent from the facsimile title-page of Innocence barely appears in Innocence copy S, prints as only two tiny fragments in the combined Songs copy AA, and disappears completely in Innocence copy U. We are brought to an odd but fortuitous reversal of Heisenberg's principle: by differing in certain respects from its

prototype, a facsimile can draw closer to important characteristics of Blake's media -- in this case, variation itself.

This is wonderfully apt, and it demonstrates the double bind in which the reproduction is caught. The modest goal of the facsimile is, of course, not to be "Blake" or even "Blakean" in the sense I have been pursuing; the facsimile's goal is to represent as exactly as possible the visual appearance of Blake's image. But it is precisely in trying to represent something other than itself that the reproduction organizes its aesthetics in opposition to Blake's. In the production-aesthetic, imitation is error; it is not so surprising then that Essick finds the Manchester Songs true to the spirit of Blake in its very errors. In this light, too, the Manchester group's celebration of its own technical accomplishment is appropriate. If the special paper is not symbolic of Blake's paper and even diverts the project from precise imitation of Blake, it is nonetheless quite Blakean, a sign of a project reveling in its own productive capacities. The more exact the reproduction, the less Blakean; conversely, in its most obtrusive mediation of Blake's image the facsimile becomes most itself, and therefore most Blakean. A perfectly forged Blake would be the least Blakean of objects, a work with absolutely no identity of its own. The better the facsimile the more it signifies that the one thing it cannot signify is Blake's hand, an "effect" that is at one and the same time scriptural and immaterial, corporeal and spiritual, for it is nothing "in" the work but the work itself. The embossed monogram is thus an

extremely complex signature, a small drama of annihilation and resurrection: as the signature of the obliteration of Blake's hand it marks the presence of another hand which has been more deeply marked by Blake.

### 8. Outward Ceremony

We could extend such a catalogue indefinitely; it is not so difficult to marshal evidence of differences between objects which are, after all, different, and our particular critical climate has further sensitized us to the difference inherent in every similarity. But if what reproduction produces is not Blake (except as "Blake"), or Blakean (except in its very differences from Blake), or even simply a neutral image representing Blake's (since Blake's "theory" is anti-mimetic), the question then remains, what does the reproduction produce?

We can approach an answer by passing through Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction," an essay frequently cited by Blake critics.<sup>25</sup> Benjamin tries to define a historical moment in which the very values Blake invokes -- identity, authenticity, spiritual uniqueness -- are broken down by reproductive technologies and by the revolutionary counter-value of the "mass." For Benjamin's concern, like my own, is not simply with technology itself but with the economy, the "age," which sustains and is sustained by it. (For Benjamin, we must keep in mind, the age is that of the rise of both fascist and communist ideologies as major political forces.)

Benjamin's essay is at one and the same time a conventional defense of photography against an aesthetic conservatism which resisted granting it status as a serious art form, and a strikingly unconventional reading of this debate within the context of the mutual repercussions of technology and history. The argument against photography as an art form, or the slightly more liberal line which would merely assign it to a lower aesthetic category, depends upon a notion of the work of art as unique and unreproducible. A number of distinctive features constellate around such a work, features which Benjamin organizes under the notorious term "aura." The work's aura depends upon an "authenticity" or "authority" which is in part personal -- the sort of evidence or recognition of the artist's "hand" which I sketched above -- and in part a matter of tradition: the "authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (221). Benjamin further anchors the aura in a "cult value" which he traces from early ritual practices, where the work of art had and/or represented a sacred existence and particular ritual functions, through secularized cults of beauty in the Renaissance up to modern notions of l'art pour l'art, the "theology of art" familiar in the late nineteenth century (224). Finally, aura is defined as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (222) -- a distance which, of course, is to be measured in cultural more than spatial terms; the rope which separates the museum-viewer from the painting marks out a symbolic distance as well as a physical

one.

Benjamin's project is to reverse these familiar and comfortable values. It is precisely by disrupting the fetishistic authority of the original that photography becomes valuable: "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (221). The "contemporary decay of the aura" is not to be lamented but celebrated; reproduction does not cheapen the image, rather it increases its democratic value. It disseminates aesthetic authority; it "detaches the reproduced from the domain of tradition"; it closes the distance between art and audience by "permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation"; it supplants the ritual function or cult value with an "exhibition value."<sup>26</sup> For Benjamin, the importance of this erosion of the aura is directly related to "the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life" (232). "The mass is a matrix from which all traditional behavior toward the work of art issues today in a new form. Quality has been transmuted into quantity" (239). "[T]he instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be available to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice -- politics" (224).<sup>27</sup> We should emphasize that what is at stake here for Benjamin is something more than a romanticized democratization of images to set against cultural (read, for Benjamin: "fascist") elitism; his concern is not simply with the redistribution of images as a kind of cultural analogue of the redistribution of wealth. The withering and decay of

the aura is the withering and decay of a class of objects, which is to say, of a class. Reproduction is a weapons-technology. The violent imagery which Benjamin at times employs to describe the aura's demise is that of the violence of class struggle.

In two articles which consider many of the same issues with which I am concerned here, Peggy Meyer Sherry and David E. James touch on the question of whether or not Blake's books are bound by aura, whether their "use value" is cultic or political. For Sherry, the fact that Blake "chose to reproduce his visions through the mechanical process of book-making . . . should in itself be a warning against ascribing cult value to them or endowing them with the mysteries of aura. . . . It is precisely the evidence of process, or reproducibility, that in calling attention to itself makes the . . . 'use value' of his books political rather than cultic." Mechanical process is reinforced, in Sherry's view, by what I have called the work's absorption in its own processes; as Sherry states, "this imagery of writing, engraving, painting and finally reading constitutes a rejection of art as theology."<sup>28</sup> For James, on the other hand, "Blake's view of art as devotional practice makes it difficult to ascribe political value to his work if . . . one defines 'political' in distinction to 'cultic.'" James agrees that the mode of production was political in its attempt to "subvert the dominant mode of literary production," but he emphasizes the project's commercial failure and argues that "Blake's continuing idealism meant that any political consequence of his efforts could only result from a 'theological' revolution of individual consciousness"; therefore "we

must locate his works according to Benjamin's distinction, among those that have cult value as opposed to exhibition value: what mattered was their existence, not their being on view."<sup>29</sup>

My prior insistence on the radical aseity of the production-aesthetic would seem to place me closer to James's position than to Sherry's, and insofar as my concern is with the status of reproduction in Blake's own aesthetic "theory," rather than with the place of that theory in a surrounding context, I would tend to agree with James. Blake's early revolutionary enthusiasm and his wish to circumvent the dominant mode of production, if not perhaps to "subvert" it, is undercut by his project's own inexorable aesthetic and economic self-absorption. One could argue that one of Blake's fundamental purposes was to produce the most intransigent aura -- perhaps, strictly speaking the only aura -- in English literature. The question, however, is not whether or not Blake wished for an aura, but whether it is the artist or some other agent who actually produces the aura. And in order to answer this question we cannot simply adopt Benjamin's distinctions at face value, as both Sherry and James do; we have to revise them.

What Benjamin calls aura is not a historical constant; every epoch defines cult value to suit its own needs. The sacred mask of some bronze age cult has one value, a Picasso painting another, but both are cult values. Furthermore, the ritual mask itself has a different value in its own social and historical context than it does in our culture, but its current value is no less cultic. Aura changes as rituals change; and aura must accommodate itself to successive aesthetic and

ideological formations. The "history which [the work] has experienced" is not unitary and continuous but the composite evidence of its adaptability to a variety of cultural environments. Exhibitions of tribal masks around the turn of the century led to their conscription as thematic materials into Picasso's painting and sculpture (e.g. Les Femmes d'Alger), and Picasso's painting and sculpture directly contributed to the reconstitution of the aura of these masks. The mask could not retain exactly the same aura it had in its African context; if it was to enter Western culture it had to adapt itself or be adapted to a different sort of ritual. Benjamin believed that detachment from tradition led to the destruction of aura; I would argue that the object's detachment from one tradition often only signals its reattachment to some successive tradition that assures the survival of the object's aura and thus, in many cases, of the object itself.

Secondly, one would assume that the aura cannot be mechanically reproduced because it is based on the totality of the artist's signatures; the cult value of a Picasso is Picasso. And yet it is not produced directly by Picasso. Cult value is based primarily on public acknowledgement, not on the signature but on its consensual validation. A painting thought to be a Vermeer for many years but one day found to be "inauthentic" loses all its substantial aura; the forger imitates the painter's style but what he forges is the aura. Cult value is organized around the artist's identity but it is not identical to it. The ritual practice on which this value is currently based is economic: aura is a social rather than an artistic product, an assigned value, a

price tag. Sometimes this price is largely ideological: the return of Picasso's Guernica to Spain, for instance, is not only the return of a particular image-formation but, more importantly, the spectacular return of an aura, defined in this case as a nationalist fetish. In capitalist societies, aura can always be measured by auction prices and the demographics of museum attendance. When a museum audience remarks on the current dollar value of some painting it is not being crass or foolish, it is quite correctly appraising and participating in the general maintenance of the work's aura.

Benjamin's error was to conclude that the polarized political struggles and aesthetic theories of his own age represented a true divergence. Mass and cult values have turned out to be differences not so much of kind as of degree; fifty more years of cultural history have amply demonstrated that "the masses" are simply the largest cult yet invented. Moreover, Benjamin did not live long enough to see that reproduction itself was by no means a guarantee of the aura's decay, that in the right economy any object can acquire an aura. This was, of course, one of the great discoveries of Pop Art and of Warhol in particular: aura can itself be reproduced. It is a discovery he made, in part, by studying the recuperation of some of the most radical gestures of the modernist avant-garde. Dada's apparent destruction of the aura, witnessed by Benjamin, was temporary at best; it led ultimately to the resurgence of that aura in other, more digestible forms. Nor is it possible any longer to believe in the absolute divergence of iterability and authenticity. Atget's photographs,

referred to by Benjamin, are exhibited in galleries and sold to the upper classes: reproduction can be controlled in such a way as to support cult value. Indeed, a photograph of a painting can be put to use to increase the painting's cult value: to circulate an image in a lesser form reinforces the distance of the "original" and sustains its marketability.<sup>30</sup> Nor is it even the apparent presence of the artist's "divine hand" which ultimately establishes the aura; Warhol, again -- in a production situation not so remote from that of Reynolds's portrait "factory" -- has found a way to forge himself.

If Benjamin in fact described an actual historical moment when a new technology managed to disrupt ritual practice and the production of cult value, that moment was by no means final. The production of aura gives way to reproduction and reproduction to the re-production of aura. Like a body generating antibodies to combat a viral invasion, the culture produces the means of adapting reproduction to its own purposes. Aura, as it turns out, is not so much a quality of the work of art per se as of the work's relation to its environment. Aura is no longer religious or aesthetic but an icon of a more modern cult, advertising. It cannot be dispersed by any transformation of the work itself, nor by some special means of production (i.e. by mechanical reproduction, by copperplate printing) but only by a transformation of the economy in which the work operates.

In Blake's case, certainly, reproduction does not mark the demise of the aura; on the contrary, it produces an aura which marks the demise of the work as work. It transforms production itself into an

icon. The facsimile simultaneously represents and de- represents the book; it represents not only the book but its difference from the book, a difference which is not passive but actively signifies the book's absence, its iconic "distance," its sacred and lucrative inaccessibility. According to the production-aesthetic, reproduction is deontological. It is the means of delivering into the cultural-economic system the very identity by which the work hoped to deliver itself from that system. The ideal state of Blakean production is neither a cult value nor an exhibition value but a third value in which neither aura nor mass has yet been enforced, an entirely marginal, cottage economy in which the cash value of a work is negotiable only by and for the artist himself, a ritual without temples, without priests, without the outward ceremony of cultural commerce. Blake tried to develop a technology which could reproduce uniqueness and distribute that uniqueness in a distinct form for each of its recipients. Palmer had his Blake, Cumberland had his, Linnell his, none necessarily tailor-made to its recipient but his nonetheless, held not within the "domain of tradition" so much as chez Palmer, chez Cumberland, chez Linnell. The project was itself unique: to conceive authenticity in such a way that it would neither "wither" nor be transformed into a commodity. The work was intended to sell, but only once; an impossible wish. We therefore need to distinguish absolutely between two audiences, two mutually exclusive historical periods of reception. The first ends and the second begins the moment the work passes out of personal possession into the library or museum and becomes that most

private of public properties, the cultural treasure. Once the work has crossed this line it can never return again.

### 9. That Dangerous Reproduction

Essick notes that Blake's knowledge of his chief artistic models -- Michelangelo, Raphael -- was not gotten first-hand but from reproductions: "nowhere in the [Public] Address does he denounce or reject copy engraving and its ways of simulating other media as long as it remains in its proper place, subordinate to original graphics and pretending to nothing more than a means of reproducing drawings and paintings."<sup>31</sup> One of my main points has been that the reproduction cannot remain in this proper place, if such a place exists at all; that whatever else the reproduction might pretend to be it is always a mode by which the production-aesthetic's semiotic is shifted to a symbolic modality, and within another semiotic -- that is to say, an economic -- context. As the edition itself textualizes Blake, what the reproduction produces is no mere "subordinate to original graphics" but a supplement.<sup>32</sup> In their own ways, the edition and the reproduction stand in the same relation to the Work as Plato occupies with respect to Socrates in Derrida's famous paradigm.<sup>33</sup> Socrates's project was medium-specific, and that medium was not conducive to an ongoing, historical, cultural circulation. Thus Plato supplements Socrates's speech with writing, a medium Socrates methodologically rejects, and which is never merely subordinate to its subject. "The supplement is

added to make up for a deficiency, but as such it reveals a lack, for since it is in excess, the supplement can never be adequate to the lack."<sup>34</sup> That is to say, in part, that the supplement opens up two deficiencies, reveals in the original the absence of that which it adds and reveals itself as that which the original subtracts. Without Plato we might well have lost the historical Socrates, but Plato's fictional Socrates finally renders "the historical Socrates" a fiction as well.

The production-aesthetic equates conception and execution absolutely: the book must occupy its own body so completely that no mediation of its Identity is possible. But the nine copies of The Marriage will never be more than nine; historically, then, critical discourse -- which is never based on nines or fives or thirty-sevens of anything, but on an infinitely generalizable one -- has had to represent this project by the very means of mechanical reproduction which, the discourse must also argue -- representing or reproducing the author's position -- are rejected by the production-aesthetic. Furthermore, crucially, after reproduction the original can never be the same again; for one thing, it is now an "original." Reproduction relativizes Blakean aseity; it provides the work with an element, a value, a disseminative capacity which the work rejects ideologically but without which it cannot survive; reproduction also guarantees that this survival will be precisely a dissemination of the work. The work comes to reveal its dependence on the reproducibility it rejects and reproduction continually represents its own rejection as a value. The production-aesthetic or what Eaves describes as the theory of

expressive identity is thus tremendously inconvenient for all parties, for it tries to condemn the work to solitary confinement in perpetuity, and it delegitimizes everyone who tries to represent it. Reproduction in turn betrays the work but this betrayal is the work's only salvation.

#### 10. The Not-Book of William Blake

It has not been my purpose to argue that the edition or reproduction is so fraudulent that it should not be permitted, but to discover what it truly represents. Judged by the production-aesthetic itself, reproductions are spectral objects, mere ratios. But from another perspective they are rich and fascinating objects: intersections of irreconcilable ontologies, unstable alloys, forgeries, double matrices, monstrous hybrids. They represent a "Blake" which they themselves automatically produce as a distinctly cultural formation; they signify the successful exercise of culture's power to transmute and recirculate certain radical or marginal projects as expressions of its own central values. The reproduction is thus a metabook whose true narrative is that of recuperation. It might be said that the reproduction is also a kind of "saving remnant" which, if "rightly placed" in reading, will still open the reader's "faculties" to "Eternity," "lead you in at Heavens gate"; but it is precisely this sort of citation, this sort of advocative pretense, this sort of thin impersonation of Blake that sentences the work to what it conceives as the fallen world. For

representation gives rise to representation: there is an unbroken ontological and methodological continuity between reproduction and interpretation. The impossibility of representing Blake in reproduction evokes the impossibility of representing him in discourse.<sup>35</sup> In a kind of Kantian warp, the noumenal production-aesthetic cannot be grasped without transforming its productions into cultural phenomena. Like trying to bring back treasure from a dream.

It is the general task of criticism to open the text to (critical) understanding, and the assumption of interpretation that what it faces is a text it can open. The spectacle of this boundless confidence has been, so to speak, our present text. I have attempted to show that if Blake's book can be opened it cannot be opened without ceasing to be Blake's, without becoming an object precluded by the production-aesthetic; this process is, moreover, irreversible. And I have attempted to ground my argument in processes which occur in a sense before the text, which give rise to the very status of Text: representation gives rise to representation. To submit one's work to a publisher is to sign a contract, however tacit, with an entire industry, a material form, a textual economy, a culture in which all authorship is fundamentally corporate and the illusion of individual authorship itself potentially a commodity. But Blake signed no such contract, willfully refused to do so; all editions of his works are pirated and everything to which they give rise, including the present essay, is called into question. It is, of course, commonplace by now to observe that no artistic vision can be unmediated. The problem is

that unmediated vision is Blake's central tenet: vision's absolute identity with itself is his vision. One might therefore be forced to conclude that Blake's vision is untenable -- that whatever one's sympathies, the vision is contradicted by what we know about artistic activity and by the very fact of one's study. So unpleasant a conclusion is avoided here. My concern has been rather with the double binds and echoing negations of attempts to agree with that tenet in forms which deny and are denied by it. The entire enterprise of Blake studies is based on the weird proposition that Satan can write books about the moment in each day he cannot find.

It is ludicrous to imagine the termination, the logical self-annihilation of Blake studies, but one might at least conclude that Blake studies has never been quite what it seemed to be. Essick recently offered a distinction between a dominant "intrinsic" criticism, epitomized by Frye and Erdman, and a newer "extrinsic" criticism based on such non-Blakean ideologies as Marxism or Structuralism.<sup>36</sup> I would reply that criticism as such is a non-Blakean ideology in a non-Blakean economy, and as such all criticism is extrinsic, has always been extrinsic, is rendered extrinsic by the very act of trying to represent an identity other than its own, its own most representative act; and, moreover, that it produces a Blake who is extrinsic to himself.

I have also tried to suggest that this recuperative economy is by no means the simple villain of the piece. Supplementary activity is generated from a tension in the production-aesthetic itself between

aseity and value, as is demonstrated for instance in the rhetoric of the 1793 Prospectus. This tension not only marginalizes Blake's work but lends it a peculiarly unstable position along the cultural margin and has helped to give rise to the processes of recuperation which characterize the history of Blake studies and which are dramatized again and again in Blake's books themselves. The tension is first of all in Blake. It is the projection of conflicting desires for freedom and absorption, for privacy and publication, for autism and audience, desires expressed in the work (if not always in the text) so deeply and radically that the work can never reconcile them; the work can only enact and reenact them, whatever its textual resolutions or apocalypses, all the way to the end of the chain of supplements.

## NOTES

All quotations from Blake's text are from The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

1. The binary symbolic/semiotic is employed here in a very limited sense. Symbolic indicates the normative signifying practice wherein any signifier is taken to stand for an extra-textual referent and the signifier itself is a kind of zero-value; "an impression of transparency is effected when the signs that make up a text appear to be centrifugal: they point away from the material body of writing they constitute" (Leon S. Roudiez, "Readable / Writable / Visible," Visible Language XII, 3 (Summer 1978), p. 232). In what I here call the semiotic modality, that material body is no longer transparent but, in a centripetal movement, signals its own productive processes (which Kristeva tends to define along quasi-Lacanian lines). My use of the distinction is partly in response to criticism's ongoing concern with Blake's "dualism," a concern epitomized in Leopold Damrosch's recent Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). So long as the "symbolic" modality dominates our attention to Blake the problem of dualism is virtually inevitable; in this respect, the centripetal motion of the semiotic would be one of

the text's most radical gestures. As in Kristeva, the symbolic here is by no means precluded but it is found to be deeply rooted in the semiotic, preceded and in a sense circumscribed by it. See Julia Kristeva, La Révolution du langage poétique. L'Avant-garde à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle: Lautréamont et Mallarmé (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

2. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in Josué V. Harari, Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 74-75.

3. Morris Eaves, William Blake's Theory of Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 177.

4. "Body and breath may seem to escape this systematization subliminally in the 'semiotic chora' of linear patterning which inscribes and reinscribes the initials 'W' and 'B' throughout the design [of the title-plate of The Book of Urizen] — in the loops that define the inner bend of the tree trunk, the curves of the decalogue behind Urizen's back, his shoulders and knees, and finally the lines of text on the book open beneath him. Yet even the unorganized sound these letters articulate fall into the trap of narcissistic symmetry, since they are not only the author's initials but even mirror one another in shape, suggesting a self-parody so extreme that the self can do nothing but sign its name all over the page it designs, rendering every shape in the design, including its own image, nothing, of course, but a supplementary flourish to the marginal non-entity of a letter." Peggy Meyer Sherry, "The 'Predicament' of the Autograph: William Blake," Glyph 4, p. 145. Sherry's article is discussed below,

section 8.

Nelson Hilton suggests the emanation / name connection in Literal Imagination: Blake's Vision of Words (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 4.

5. See Morris Eaves, "Blake and the Artistic Machine: An Essay in Decorum and Technology," PMLA XCII, 5 (October 1977), pp. 903-927.

6. For an excellent example of the first, see Helen T. McNeil, "The Formal Art of The Four Zoas," in David V. Erdman and John E. Grant, eds., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 373-390. For an example of the second, see Eaves, Blake's Theory of Art.

7. John Howard, "An Audience for The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Blake Studies III, 1 (Fall 1970), pp. 19-52; Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 47.

8. Robert N. Essick, William Blake Printmaker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 120; Eaves, "Blake and the Artistic Machine."

9. Butler, p. 43.

10. One should not exaggerate the scope of this institution. Techniques for the true mass-production of books were not introduced in England until the 1820s; in Blake's time, all publishing was as yet something of a cottage industry. But it still had the character of a social institution, and however miniscule by modern standards, that

institution held sway in its own social setting.

11. James Thorpe, Principles of Textual Criticism (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1972), p. 48.

12. Jerome J. McGann, A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 48. McGann uses Blake as an instance of a writer who refused to submit his production to the corporate authorship of literary institutions, attempting to become instead a "literary institution unto himself," but lacking "one crucial component" of that institution: "the reviewer" (p. 47). My own thesis is that this "lack" is much more fundamental and far-reaching.

13. Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory (London: Verso Editions, 1978), pp. 45-63.

14. Günther Anders, "Being Without Time: On Beckett's Play Waiting for Godot," in Martin Esslin, Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 144.

In "The Final State of The Four Zoas" (forthcoming in Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly), I suggest that The Four Zoas could represent an experiment with what might have seemed to Blake a more commercially viable means of production, a mix of copperplate and letterpress technologies.

15. Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books / New Left Review, 1976), pp. 139, 140.

16. Ibid., p. 229.

17. Michael J. Warren, "Quarto and Folio King Lear and the

Interpretation of Albany and Edgar," in David Bevington and Jay L. Halio, eds., Shakespeare: Pattern of Excelling Nature (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1978), pp. 95-107. See also Gary Taylor and Warren, eds., The Division of the Kingdoms (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

18. Randall McLeod, "The Psychopathology of Everyday Art," lecture presentation at the California Institute of Technology, Spring 1983.

19. Review of the Manchester Etching Workshop's facsimile of the Songs; see below, section 7.

20. Nelson Hilton notes many such effects in Literal Imagination; see, for instance, pp. 17-18.

21. Santa Cruz Blake Study Group, review of David V. Erdman, ed., The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, in Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly (forthcoming, 1984). I owe a special debt to the other members of this collective, Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler.

22. Ron Silliman, "Notes on the Relation of Theory to Practice," Paper Air 2,2 (1979), p. 11. Stephen Leo Carr discusses closely related issues in "Blake's 'Works of Illuminated Printing': Toward a Logic of Difference," presented at the 1982 "Blake and Criticism" Conference at UC Santa Cruz. Just how close I mean to come to Carr's position may be demonstrated by two quotations from his essay: "The dismissal or reduction of [copy] difference gains implicit support from the still common assumption that an essentially homogeneous (non-contradictory) 'System' or 'Myth' underlies Blake's art, guaranteeing

that each illuminated book is finally a performance of the same, a marginal deviation from some ur-text or 'Vision.'" "The stereotyped 'original' on the etched plate exists only as an idealized abstraction. A plate design may establish certain technical and artistic limits (of 'Opakeness' and 'Contraction') on the material processes of differentiation, but it does not constitute a privileged, canonical version." Carr's essay is excellent, and one hopes it will soon find its way into print.

23. David Erdman, The Illuminated Blake (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1974), p. 15; my emphases.

24. One could go on to note, for instance, even so invisible an effect as binding, readily presupposed as a self-identical feature of books. But does binding figure in the production-aesthetic? How clear is our idea of Blake's overall formatting of his books? How were they stitched and covered? In as definitive a fashion as publishers employ, or loosely stitched and wrapped? If loosely, then was it in order to facilitate unstitching, and just for rebinding? Is there not also something in even the most "narrative" of the illuminated books of the art gallery (cf. Hogarth's "Rake's Progress")? Was the book to offer the possibility of a kind of portable museum (cf. "portable fresco")? In any case, has anyone fully explored the tensions in the work itself between firm bounding lines and the horrors of binding and being bound?

25. In Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 217-51.

26. Obviously Benjamin is not referring to an exhibition in a

temple of culture like the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This would by no means be a break from the domain of tradition, but merely the ritual celebration and intensification of the aura, enforcing the work's distance precisely by the special circumstances of its display.

27. Benjamin also witnesses the perversion of this agency into an aesthetic principle, not the politicization of art but the aestheticization of politics. "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war" (241). Something more than a hundred years, then, separates Benjamin from Blake, something very much dependent upon our century's fuller exposure to the face of fascism. An incipient critique is available throughout Blake -- for instance, in the protofascism of *Urizen*, especially his early depictions -- but perhaps nothing in Blake has the terrible resonance of the conclusion of this essay written in German and published in 1936: humanity's "self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic." We cannot omit Benjamin's final sentence, to which another fifty years bears another sort of witness: "Communism responds by politicizing art" (242).

28. Meyer, p. 133.

29. David E. James, "Blake's *Laocoön*: A Degree Zero of Literary Production," *PMLA*, XCVIII, 2 (March 1983), pp. 235-36.

30. Carr makes a similar point. See also Sidney Tillim, "Since the late 18th century the function of art as a form of value, and how

that value was to be defined, has been anything but clear," Artforum (May 1983), pp. 67-73.

31. Essick, Printmaker, p. 205.

32. See Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 141-164.

33. See Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 63-171; and La Carte-Postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà (Paris: Flammarion, 1980).

34. Harari, p. 34.

35. I would propose, in respect to Blake, two principles of representational jurisprudence, what one could call the Bobby Seale Corollaries:

A client who does not recognize the authority of the court is not likely to be a cooperative and grateful client.

A client who does not recognize the authority of the court can nonetheless be tried, convicted and sentenced according to its law.

36. Essick, "Blake Today and Tomorrow," Studies in Romanticism 21, 3 (Fall 1982), p. 397.