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‘ASSAILING THE THING’
Politics of Space in William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides*

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THE interlude between the decline of Jacobin leadership at the end of the eighteenth century, and emergence of Chartism in the 1830s occupies an interesting place in the history of the English working classes. It is in the early-nineteenth-century moment that we see the crystallisation of what John Brewer has called an 'alternative structure of politics' that changed the shape of popular radicalism in significant ways.¹ Rather than the sporadic and spontaneous activism of the eighteenth-century 'rebellious crowd',² post-French-Revolution radicals increasingly came to rely on the 'independent press' as a means for disseminating radical messages. The popularity of radical press among the working classes encouraged the formation a new, literate constituency that, unlike the eighteenth-century crowd, defined 'natural rights' and 'freedom' within a discursive and argumentative context. Samuel Bamford, the radical weaver, shows how the demand for 'parliamentary reform' captured the popular imagination of the country in 1816 as the outcome of this new method of radicalism:

At this time the writings of William Cobbett suddenly became of great authority; they were read on nearly every cottage hearth in the manufacturing districts of South Lancashire, in those of Leicester, Derby, and Nottingham; also in many of the Scottish manufacturing towns. Their influence was speedily visible; he directed his readers to the true cause of their sufferings—misgovernment; and to its proper corrective—parliamentary reform. Riots soon became scarce, and from that time they have never obtained their ancient vogue with the labourers of this country.³

The subaltern version of the 'society of the text' that emerged from London Corresponding Society's creative adaptation of the 'bourgeois public sphere' within the working-man's milieu also brought about a significant shift in the identity of the radical leader.⁴ On the one hand, unlettered working-class heroes such as Jeremiah Brandeth and Arthur Thistlewood made an attempt to expand the long-standing, sub-political tradition of popular protest into an organised movement, but met with crushing defeat in the absence of coordination and foresight. While their legacy of popular, but naïve activism raises interesting questions about 'organic' working-class leadership,⁵ this essay mainly concerns the other spokesman for the working classes, the middle-class radical or,

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1. John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), p. 16.
 2. I borrow this term from E. P. Thompson's study of popular radicalism in the early eighteenth century in *Customs in Common* (New York: The New Press, 1989). Also see George Rudé's exhaustive study on the radicalism of the crowd in the England in *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest* (New York: Viking, 1971).
 3. Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1840–43; Oxford: OUP, 1984), p. 13.
 4. In *The Making of the English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), Jon Klancher links the formation of the 'public sphere' with the creation of a 'society of the text', that initiates a new working-class identity in the late eighteenth century (see especially, pp. 20–24). Similar to Klancher's analysis that links the formation of a democratic ideal with the formation of a 'society of the text' is Jürgen Habermas's connection between the ideal of the 'republic of letters' with the ideal of a free-market economy, as argued in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).
 5. Antonio Gramsci's idea of the 'organic' intellectual is central to this investigation. According to Gramsci, against the more liminal figure of the 'traditional' intellectual, the 'organic' leader, while sharing the common experience of a class, is able to organize its members towards the construction of a new society—*Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (1948–51), trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 5–8. The multiple registers that would determine the formation of an 'organic working-class English intellectual' reveal the complexity of that process. That ideal and unreachable figure provides the evaluative framework for my essay, which examines one aspect of that formation in the radicalism of the middle-class intellectual in the early nineteenth century. James Epstein has analysed the applicability and limits of the category of the 'organic intellectual' in the English working-class context through the figure of Richard Carlile, who, like other intellectuals of his time was caught between the pull of ambition and the interests of his community—see Epstein's 'Bred as a Mechanic: Plebian Intellectuals and Popular Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century England', in *Intellectuals and Public Life: Between Radicalism and Reform*, edd. Leon Fink, Stephen Leonard, and Donald Reid (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1996). This binary is useful for examining the middle-class radicals as well.

in the words of John Belchem and James Epstein, the 'gentleman leader'.⁶ In the wake of state-sponsored repression after the French Revolution, former Jacobin sympathisers such as John Horne Tooke and 'Major' Cartwright became exponents of what Peter Spence has called 'Romantic radicalism',⁷ a political stance that aimed its critique almost exclusively against the 'boroughmongering' Pitt ministry, while acknowledging the supremacy of the English constitution and Crown.⁸ By replacing Thomas Paine's vocabulary of 'principles' and 'reason' with a 'neo-Harringtonian' one that stressed personal morality and civic virtue, the new leadership also altered the link between the Radical leader and society.⁹ Where the Jacobin leader John Thelwall employed the Godwinian and Paineite language of the 1790s to declare humbly that he was nothing but 'a part—a little, little member of the great animal of human society—a papillary nerve upon one of the extremities',¹⁰ the Romantic radical canvassed his personal life, career and moral authority as the primary argument for Reform. William Cobbett's bold, if somewhat exaggerated, claim in the 1830s 'that more than a thousand volumes have been written and published for the sole purpose of impeding the progress of [...] truths that dropped from [his] pen [...] [and] that [he has] invariably shown that [he] loved and honoured [his] country, and that [he] preferred its greatness and happiness far beyond [his] own' is an index of this new self-affirmative culture that upheld personal integrity rather than organised dissent as the answer to the malaise of corruption.¹¹

William Cobbett has an interesting and unique place within this new Radical leadership of the early nineteenth century. Placed within the dialectic of the formation of an 'organic' working-class English intellectual, Cobbett occupies an uneasy role between an earlier Jacobin and later Chartist leadership. I follow many of Cobbett's commentators in studying his life and writings to show how the gentleman leader's moral economy cast him in a double role of the 'demagogue' and 'martyr',¹² and further, the ways in which that ambivalent role weakened his radical message. As Belchem and Epstein point out, Cobbett's relationship with his working-class community of 'chopsticks', was forged 'around a mythic unity of sentiment between high and low: gentleman and people'.¹³ On the one hand, Cobbett's interest in the working classes combined the 'hagiology' of radical martyrdom with the organicism of a farmer-turned-politician model of *vivere civile*,¹⁴ while celebrating the power of the individual/intellectual who is undaunted by hegemonic processes:

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6. See their 'The Nineteenth-Century Gentleman Leader Revisited', *Social History* 22:2 (May 1997), 174–94.
 7. Peter Spence's exhaustive analysis of early-nineteenth-century English radicalism in terms of 'a romantic appeal to a organic national identity, epitomized by the patriarchal monarchy, the apostolic church, and an historicist constitutional, legal and moral theory of knowledge', is key to understanding the differences of these gentlemen leaders from their earlier Jacobin prototype—*Birth of Romantic Radicalism: War, Popular Politics and English Radical Reformism, 1800–1815* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), p. 10.
 8. Spence explains the rise of the 'romantic radicalism' as the fallout of the post-French-Revolution regime of Terror that, in England, gave rise to 'a curious coalition between those patriots who were the heirs of [John] Wilkes and [Thomas] Paine, and those loyalists whose views were best expressed by [William] Cobbett' (p. 198).
 9. I borrow the term 'civic virtue' from J. G. A. Pocock's seminal analysis of the revival of pre-capitalist and utopian ideas in capitalist eighteenth-century England in the form of a neo-Harringtonian doctrine of propertied virtue. Pocock's *Politics, Language and Time* (1971; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), as well as Eugene Kamenka and R. S. Neale (eds.), *Feudalism, Capitalism and Beyond* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1976) are useful for a detailed analysis of the neo-Harringtonianism.
 10. *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall*, ed. Gregory Claeys (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 102.
 11. William Cobbett, *Rural Rides [...] with Economical and Political Observations*, 2 vols. (1830; London: Reeves and Turner, 1908), II, 374. Subsequent references will be from this edition and given in the text.
 12. These are E. P. Thompson's instructive categories, employed in his discussion of the role of Henry Hunt and his circle (amongst them Cobbett) in the making of the working classes—see his *Making of the English Working Class* (London: Vintage, 1966), pp. 603–710.
 13. Belchem and Epstein, p. 181.
 14. Kevin Binfield's analysis of Cobbett's political method proposes the twin concepts of 'hagiology' and 'demonology' as the moral vocabulary of a 'radical martyrology': whereas 'demonology' launches an invective

Born in a farm house, bred up at the plough tail, with a smock-frock on my back, taking great delight in all the pursuits of farmers, liking their society, and having amongst them my most esteemed friends, it is natural that I should feel, and I do feel, uncommonly anxious to prevent, as far as I am able, that total ruin that now menaces them. But, the labourer, was I to have no feeling for him? Was he not my countryman too? And was I not to feel indignation against those farmers, who had had the hard-heartedness to put the bell around [the labourer's] neck, and thus wantonly insult and degrade the class to whose toils they owed their own ease? (*Rural Rides* I, 91)¹⁵

But the working-man was to be rescued from an exploitative system only to be reinstated within a reformist mandate informed by a 'politics of nostalgia'.¹⁶ The paternal ambition to guide the working classes while feeding off their huzzahs of approbation fits in neatly with the agrarian ideal of a society organised around freeholders. In an age where Chartists were reconfiguring society through the prism of class inequities, Cobbett and his circle preferred to idealise an image of 'Old England', in which the worker would be conferred a civic identity hitherto denied to him, but also controlled by the paternal benevolence of his superiors. Thus, even while Henry Hunt and other radical leaders used the support of the 'lower' orders to further their political agendas, they were apprehensive of granting autonomy to the working classes, a paradox that also infects Cobbett's political stance:

If one could suppose the power of doing what they liked placed in the hands of the labouring classes; if one could suppose such a thing as this, which was never yet seen; if one could suppose anything so monstrous as that of a revolution that would leave no public authority any where; even in such a case, it is against nature to suppose, that the people would come and turn him out of his house and leave him without food; and yet that they must do to make him, as a landholder, worse off than he is; or, at least, worse off than he must be in a very short time. (*Rural Rides* I, 198)

Cobbett's backward-looking 'wish to see the poor men of England what the poor men of England were when [he] was born' has prompted Raymond Williams to caution us that 'he could be a friend in spirit, but he was not on our road'.¹⁷ One line of inquiry in my essay that emerges out of Williams's empathetic, yet critical evaluation of Cobbett as a 'good brave old chap, who lived just before modernity', provides a fresh context for understanding how Cobbett combined Thomas Paine's metacritical method with the moral vocabulary of civic humanism, in order to generate a style of politics and political writing that radically conflated the personal with the political. This analysis borrows from two different, but related aspects of English history: one, the changing language of politics during the years when Cobbett was developing his ideas between Paine and Edmund Burke, and two, the impact of the French Revolution and its aftermath upon the construction of English identity. I suggest that while Cobbett borrows Paine's radical lexicon for linking his anti-Whig civic humanism with the cause of the impoverished worker, his insistence upon

against enemies, 'hagiology' elevates Cobbett to the status of a 'moral guardian', in a 'moral drama, or perhaps a battle, requiring a suitable hero'—'Demonology, Ethos, and Community in Cobbett and Shelley', in *Romanticism, Radicalism and the Press*, ed. Stephen Behrendt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp. 160–61.

15. The neo-Harringtonian relationship between selfhood and political activity is based on an Aristotelian model of ethics, where the two states of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* were mediated by the ideal of *vivere civile*, in Pocock's words, 'a way of life given over to civic concerns and the (ultimately political) activity of citizenship'—*The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 56. The philosophic basis of *vivere civile* was the conception that it was in action and production of works and deeds that life of man rose to the stature of those universal values that were immanent in it.
16. This is Isaac Kramnick's term, which attempts to locate the impetus behind an unlikely alliance between displaced aristocracy that formed the 'Bolingbroke Circle', and dispossessed workers in the eighteenth century. Though not an aristocrat, Cobbett carries over this political strain into a Paineite England. See Kramnick's *Bolingbroke and his Circle: Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).
17. See Raymond Williams, *Cobbett* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), pp. 29 and 57.

the primacy of English traditions and customs, especially in the aftermath of the French Revolution, radically alters Paine's 'rational' discourse. What comes out of this exchange is what I call a 'physical' style of narrative that emphasises a 'common sense' perspective based upon an immediate and sensory interaction with the world. Furthermore, an examination of Cobbett's writings from the two contexts described above allows us to reconfigure his retrospective radicalism in terms of the dialectical struggles of Antonio Gramsci's 'contradictory consciousness'. In this reading, the radical leader's fluctuation between received structures of thought ('uncritically absorbed' and interiorised) and the natural desire to transform the world as a member of a larger community gets dramatised as a conflict between the opposite demands of ego and civic selfhood.¹⁸

The drama between the conflicting agons of personal vs. political, or ego vs. civic duty is the defining feature of *Rural Rides* that records Cobbett's journeys through an impoverished English countryside in a post-Napoleonic era. In Cobbett's narrative, autobiography and political economy are one and the same discourse: enemies of Reform are to be judged as much by their degree of animosity towards Cobbett and their knowledge of English grammar, as by their role within the Whig administration. Yet, an unrestricted mingling of two disparate modes—a self-centered epic adventure interwoven with a political agenda of uplifting the English worker—exerts a strain on Cobbett's narrative that veers between two extremities of ethnographic reportage. We may read *Rural Rides* to understand how a self-referential approach can convert every object of encounter into the evidence of a corrupt system in order to argue for the moral superiority of the author.¹⁹ Alternatively, *Rural Rides* may also be seen as a narrative in which the personal encounter and the author-as-actor stance become a tool for revealing Cobbett's intimate and extensive knowledge of his community, and thus to challenge the 'scientific' and 'objective' author-as-spectator approach of Thomas Malthus and other middle-class ideologues. The following passage combines the aspects of personal gratification and political criticism that are typical of Cobbett's narrative:

The landlady sent her son to get me some cream, and he was just such a chap as I was at his age [...] This boy will, I dare say, perform his part at Billingham, or at some place not far from it. If accident had not shaken me from a similar scene, how many villains and fools, who have been well teased and tormented, would have slept in peace at night, and have fearlessly swaggered about by day! When I look at this little chap; at his smock-frock, his nailed shoes, and his clean, plain, coarse shirt, I ask myself, will anything, I wonder, ever send this chap across the ocean, to tackle the base, corrupt, perjured Republican Judges of Pennsylvania? Will this little lively, but, at the same time, simple boy, ever become the terror of villains and hypocrites across the Atlantic? (*Rural Rides* I, 216–17)

We see how the stress on the personal, rather than an institutional enemy generates a subtext of 'radical demonology' in Cobbett's discourse, that according to Kevin Binfield 'permitted his audience to rethink political and economic crises in terms of personal conflict rather than institutional processes'.²⁰ And yet, Cobbett's active role in that scene allows him to dramatise Radical sentiment by connecting the personal with the political, where an oppressive system allows a 'simple' and 'lively' boy to define his identity as a challenger of that regime. The full significance of the collapse between public and private realms in Cobbett's narrative is deployed in a tripartite

18. Gramsci's notion of the 'active man-in-the-mass' who resolves his 'contradictory consciousness' through a 'struggle of political hegemonies [...] first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper' (p. 333), provides a useful model for studying the intricate combination of circumstance and aspiration that motivated middle-class radicals.

19. The importance of this point is driven home by Cobbett himself: 'All my plans in private life; all my pursuits; all my designs, wishes, and thoughts, have this one great object in view: *The overthrow of the ruffian Boroughmongers*. If I write grammars; if I write on agriculture; if I sow, plant, or deal in seeds; whatever I do has *first* in view the destruction of those infamous tyrants'—*Political Register*, 14 Aug 1819.

20. Binfield, p. 160.

movement: from the immediate locale of the production of Cobbett's spatial practice in early-nineteenth-century England, to an examination of the synthetic spatial imagination of the narrative itself to, finally, locating its impact within the larger context of the formation of the 'bourgeois public sphere'.

History and Heterotopia in Cobbett's Civic Humanism

Noel Thompson's *The People's Science* (1984) traces Thomas Paine's influence in nineteenth-century Britain as a movement away from an emphasis on the 'physical' and phenomenal *topoi* of the 'agrarian radicals' in working-class journals such as *Political Register* and the *Black Dwarf*, to a more structural critique that after 1825 addressed issues of exploitation at an increasingly theoretical level in *Trades Newspaper* and other cooperative press publications. In the triangular locus that surrounded issues of labour and poverty in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, Cobbett occupies a middle position between the Placian faction that held state intervention as the cause of evil, and an emergent socialist discourse that was awakening to a labour theory of value and saw economic exploitation as intrinsic to capitalism. Cobbett, whose critique is more *political* than *economic*, distinguishes himself from classical economists ('the impudent Scotch quacks [...] crying up the doctrine of Malthus') and metanarratives of labour theories by yoking together an older binary between land/property and labour with a Paineite vocabulary of 'natural rights'. In this version of events, the problems of poverty and unrest (specifically in the countryside) are seen as the direct outcome of a 'system' led by 'boroughmongers' and 'tax-eaters', that forced labourers into impoverishment. Following Paine's analysis of the system of debt and taxation in *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1796), Cobbett unearths the horrors of rural deracination and depopulation by chastising the Whig bravado of 'waust improvements' in the countryside. The terms of the critique are significant as a converging of multiple strands of economic thought. First, Paine points towards the beginnings of a structural critique, where a universalist vocabulary argued for the merits of democratic and labour-based social order against illogic of a hierarchical, property-based one. Paine organised his critique through a vocabulary that focused on 'principles' rather than personalities, and based it on a 'rational' enquiry into the validity of 'tradition':

But, after all, what is this metaphor called a crown, or rather what is monarchy? Is it a thing, or is it a name, or is it a fraud? Is it a 'contrivance of human wisdom,' or human craft, to obtain money from a nation under specious pretences? Is it a thing necessary to a nation? If it is, in what does that necessity consist, what service does it perform, what is its business, and what are its merits? (*Rural Rides* II, 325)

Like other intellectuals of the day, Cobbett displays the influence of Paine's irresistible metacritical method. Critics have celebrated Cobbett's 'Address to Journeymen and Labourers' (1816) as a significant step in the direction of 'rational' enquiry, where a vocabulary based on 'principles' rather than personalities is paralleled by the replacement of a detached 'I' with the more communal 'we', both of which hint at a new kinship between Cobbett and the working classes.²¹ But, after a promising start, the attempt to locate the *cause* of the present deracination, instead of progressing into an analysis of labour exploitation, remains entirely within the parliamentary turf of the 'Pitt

21. Binfield has situated the 'Address' as Cobbett's decisive move towards a working-class identification, referring especially to its opening lines, beginning 'Whatever the Pride of rank, of riches or of scholarship may have induced some men to believe, or to affect to believe, the real strength and all the resources of the country, ever have sprung and ever must spring, from the *labour* of its people'—'Address to the Journeymen and Labourers of England', *Political Register* 31:18 (1816), 433 (hereafter cited as 'Address'). Where Binfield sees in these lines a vindication of the labouring community that injects narratives of English nationalism with a subaltern perspective by both creating and responding to the rise of class as a presence, I tend to agree with Williams's reading: namely, that the 'Address' is a model of a process, within which an 'intense phase of self-organization and protest by a still-forming working and labouring class was intervened in and in part appropriated by a primarily middle-class reforming movement, in the interest of small employers' (p. 17).

system': 'As to the *Cause* of our present miseries, it is the enormous amount of the taxes, which the government compels us to pay for the support of its army, its placemen, its pensioners, &c. and for the payment of the interest of its debt' ('Address', p. 438). Just as the cause of the problem is local, so must the solution be: 'Thus, then, it is clear, that it is the weight of the taxes, under which you are sinking, which has already pressed so many of you down into the state of paupers, and which now threatens to deprive many of you of your existence [...] and you will soon see, that this intolerable weight has *all proceeded from the want of a Parliamentary Reform*'.

In the process of elevating the labourer to the position of a civilian with rights (denied by the system) and duties (to save England from the system by opposing it), Cobbett falls back upon a civic-humanist model, with the argument that labour as the creator of value should be awarded the power of franchise, hitherto given only to property owners. This version of politics resembles a democratised neo-Harringtonian ideology of propertied virtue that goes far back into English intellectual history. The eighteenth-century revival of neo-Harringtonianism infected writers such as Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, whose trenchant critique of Whig commercialism took the form of 'country versus city' and 'land versus money' polarities. The neo-Harringtonian ideology of the eighteenth century sought to counter an 'epistemology of fantasy' generated by the booms and busts of a 'financial revolution',²² by representing the 'gentleman's or yeoman's independence in land and arms as performing the function of the oikos in an English or Virginian polis'.²³ Cobbett transports this ideology of rootedness and land-based virtue into the rather complex locale of the nineteenth century, where the debt situation after Waterloo allows an appropriate homology with the early-eighteenth-century situation. The 'Pitt system' is seen as a threat to the moral fabric of English society:

This vile paper-money and funding-system, this system of Dutch descent, begotten by Bishop Burnett, and born in hell; this system has turned everything into a gamble.

There are hundreds of men who live by being the agents to carry on gambling [...] In such a state of things how are you to expect young men to enter on a course of patient industry? How are you to expect that they will seek to acquire fortune and fame by study or by application of any kind? (*Rural Rides* I, 261)

Critique of the 'funding system' proceeds from a reference to lost Arcadia. In this rendering, an opulent and organic agrarian community bound by tradition and presided over by gentlemen farmers is threatened by an emergent breed of bourgeoisie whose interest lies primarily in profit and commodity. For Cobbett, replacement of land by money initiates 'unnatural changes' that threaten the moral fabric of society. Social relations are replaced by commodity relations: 'a resident native gentry, attached to the soil, known to every farmer and labourer from their childhood, frequently mixing with them in those pursuits where all artificial distinctions are lost, practicing hospitality

22. Pocock's instructive term, 'epistemology of fantasy', is an important one that traces an experience associated with modernity to an eighteenth-century experience of an 'epistemology of fantasy' generated by a market economy. In this model, '[b]ooms and busts, bulls and bears, became the determinants of politics. The value of public stock, the Dow Jones ratings of the eighteenth century becomes the index to the stability of governments, and all this was seen as placing politics at the mercy of a self-generated hysteria'—*Virtue, Commerce and History*, p. 112. Equally significant is P. G. M. Dickson's explanation of the 'financial revolution' of eighteenth century, which followed the political revolution of 1688: 'The crucial steps in the Financial Revolution were the foundation of the Bank of England and the institution of National Debt. Individuals great and small were now encouraged to lend money to the government and live off the returns on their capital, thus investing in the future stability of the Revolution. With these loans as its security, the government was enabled to borrow on a yet larger scale and with funds thus raised to carry out a massive expansion and perpetuation of the professional army and navy, together with the civilian bureaucracies that sustained them and their conquests. It reached a point of embarking upon enterprises and contracting loans that could not be paid off on the security of existing funds, so that repayment had to be secured upon revenues to be raised in the future; but war could not be paid out of public credit alone, and necessitated a steady rise in taxes, levied for the most part upon land.'—*The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688–1756* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1967), p. 11.

23. See Kamenka and Neale, p. 80.

without ceremony, from habit and not on calculation' were fast metamorphosing into 'a gentry, only now-and-then residing at all, having no relish for country delights, foreign in their manners, distant and haughty in their behaviour, looking to the soil only for its rents, viewing it as a mere object of speculation, unacquainted with its cultivators, despising them and their pursuits, and relying, for influence, not upon the good will of the vicinage, but upon the dread of their power' (*Rural Rides* I, 46).

Cobbett's distaste for the commodification of land and human relationships may perhaps be the underlying motivation behind his search for a new audience, similar to the manner in which an earlier 'politics of nostalgia' saw an alliance between the working class and aristocracy in the eighteenth century. In 1816, rather than the middle-class farmer of Cobbett's childhood recollections, it is the poverty-stricken labourer who comes to represent an authentic community outside the booms and busts of the market. But while the confluence of neo-Harringtonian rhetoric and Paineite ideas enables Cobbett to focus his critique of the Whig system through the lens of the labouring community, his vision is limited by the 'agrarian radical' position that 'saw labour exploitation as a product of actions and decisions made with consciously exploitative intent, i.e. as a product of legislative or political rather than economic action'.²⁴ While democratising neo-Harringtonianism via Paine, Cobbett also performs a reverse move of appropriating Paine's internationalist vision into an English locale, as an argument *for* and not *against* the English Constitution. When Cobbett brings Paine's bones back to England in 1816, he not only suggests a re-inauguration of Paineite radicalism, but also a reconstruction of Paine's identity within a tradition of *English* nonconformity. This insistence upon an 'English' Paine assumes further importance in light of the effect of French Revolution on English self-identity. Among the various 'fictions' of the Revolution, David Simpson has identified one dominant strain within the English response that continues well into the twentieth century. English debates on the French Revolution that aligned themselves along a pro-Paine/Jacobin or a pro-Burke/Loyalist axis were conducted, according to Simpson, along the lines of French theory vs. English pragmatism, where the former was held responsible for the terror and violence generated by the attempt to construct a society from abstract principles. This myth was serviced in the construction of an anti-rationalist paradigm, 'that identified being "English" with being against theory, against method, against rules and systems, and in favor of practicality, tolerance, compromise, and common sense, all the things that a methodised paradigm most visibly threatens'.²⁵ By conflating a nationalist sentiment with an anti-theory bias that stressed the solidity of the written constitution, Cobbett significantly alters Paine's universalist focus. Appeals to reason and rational paradigms are carried into the concrete space of everyday life, symbolised by time-tested English traditions. Even while embracing the French Revolution as a spontaneous movement of an oppressed people (a significant change from the earlier anti-Jacobin rant of *Peter Porcupine*), Cobbett contrasts the English legacy of Constitutionalism with French anarchy of thought and action, thus furthering arguments for Reform, rather than Revolution:

It was the misfortune of the French people that they had no great and settled principles to refer to in their laws or history. They sallied forth and inflicted vengeance on their oppressors; but, for want of settled principles, to which to refer, they fell into confusion; they massacred each other; they next flew to a military chief to protect them even against themselves; and the result has been what we too well know. ('Address', p. 455)

At one end of the spectrum, Robespierre signified the *practical* threat of an intellectual project defined outside of history and tradition (and in this Cobbett differs from the Jacobin response to

24. Noel Thompson, *The People's Science: The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis, 1816–1834* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), p. 114.

25. David Simpson, *Fictions of the French Revolution*, ed. Bernadette Fort (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p. 139.

Robespierre voiced by Thelwall and Coleridge).²⁶ At the other end was the danger of mystification posed by intellectual activity, where a 'verbose and obscure' Adam Smith, 'population-check parson' Malthus, and Methodist preachers deployed 'cant and affectation' in order to hide 'facts' from people. Against these two models—Robespierre and Malthus—Cobbett based his method upon 'experience', in the tradition of the self-styled English yeoman Arthur Young, who had been 'too long a farmer to be governed by any thing but events [...] [and had] a constitutional abhorrence of theory; of all trust in abstract reasoning; and consequently a reliance merely on experience, in other words, on events, the only principle worthy of an experimenter.'²⁷ In Cobbett's narrative, encounter is privileged over theory. Rather than a statistical approach, knowledge is obtained by '[h]earing what gentlemen, farmers, tradesmen, journeymen, labourers, women, girls, boys and all have to say; reasoning with some, laughing with others and observing all that passes' (*Rural Rides* I, 45). During Cobbett's forays through an impoverished countryside marked by violence and repression, the memory of his father who 'used to sit at the head of the oak table along with his men, say grace with them, and cut up the meat and pudding' (*Rural Rides* I, 239) provides a chronotopic ideal with which to critique the present and map the future.

Volume Over Surface: Cobbett's Physical Method

The descriptive cast of *Rural Rides* catalogues all kinds of observable phenomena with uniform attention. Trivia about cows without horns, whose black or red spots ranged 'from the size of a plate to that of a crown piece' (*Rural Rides* I, 8), are related with the same factual rigour as the story of 'very pretty girls [...] ragged as colts, and pale as ashes' who go about with 'blue arms and blue lips' on a cold frosty day (*Rural Rides* I, 18). This preference for matter over abstract categories determines Cobbett's system of values even at a sub-political level: fertility of soil is preferred over picturesque beauty, action rather than inspiration, sports over schools, sand-hill rather than Oxford and Cambridge, rootedness over mobility, frugality against commodity, country vs. city, and so on. Tactility becomes the synthesising force of Cobbett's narrative that argues for the 'common sense' perspective of English customs and traditions in order to challenge Whig economy. In a passage that remarkably reveals the strengths and weaknesses of that narrative, Cobbett asserts with his characteristic self-confidence,

I am convinced that these fogs are dry clouds, such as those that I saw on the Hampshire-Downs [...] It is the fogs that rise out of swamps, and other places, full of putrid vegetable matter, that kill people [...] Thus the smell has a great deal to do with health. There can be no doubt that Butchers and their wives fatten upon the smell of meat. And this accounts for the precept of my grandmother, who used to tell me to bite my bread and smell to my cheese; talk, much more wise than that of certain old grannies, who go about England crying up 'the blessings' of paper-money, taxes, and national debts. (*Rural Rides* I, 2–3)

The preference for tradition over novelty, based on smell and touch transmutes itself into the primacy of material over metaphysical, and body over mind, 'not "Religious Tracts," which would, if they could, make the labourer content with half-starvation, but [...] bread and cheese and beer, being firmly convinced, that it is the body that wants filling and not the mind' (*Rural Rides* I, 127). Further, the physical space of the body has an important role in the war against corruption. Cobbett's confrontation with a gang of hired thugs is narrated with a sense of pride and pleasure: 'I got many blows in the sides, and, if I had been either a short or a weak man, I would have been pressed under foot, and inevitably killed [...] I had to fight with my right hand. I had to strike back-

26. Robespierre's life and fate was a source of fascination for both Thelwall and Coleridge: not only did Thelwall boldly defend Robespierre against those who saw him as representative of the excesses of the French Revolution, but he also attempted to prove that Pitt was a worse statesman than Robespierre.

27. Quoted in Simpson, p. 137.

handed'.²⁸ At a different level, physical pain and hunger are presented as unsentimental facts that challenge the intellectual activity of 'the metaphysical gentleman', who, according to Cobbett, should have 'a spade put into his hands for ten days [and be] compelled to dig only just as much as one of the common labourers at Fulham', before passing his judgments (*Rural Rides* II, 77–78).

For Cobbett, both the space of the body with its visible tribulations and the physical *topoi* of rural England reveal the spatial practice of the 'THING'. Through what James Mulvihill calls 'the medium of landscape',²⁹ Cobbett points to locales such as the 'very anti-Jacobin Hill', or, Whitchurch, the site of money production ('the curse of England'), as 'villainous' participants in the process of 'unnatural changes'. Both bad roads and smooth roads (a 'real stockjobber's road') represent the corruption of the 'accursed Pitt system'. At a broader level, the entire landscape of rural Britain is seen to bear the marks of a changing political and economic order. Where a Constable or a Wordsworth might conceive of rural landscape in picturesque or reflective ways, Cobbett characteristically fastens on economic issues of production and distribution. For him,

[i]t is impossible to be upon this honey-combed hill; upon this enormous mass of anti-Jacobin expenditure, without seeing the chalk-cliffs of Calais and the corn-fields of France. At this season, it is impossible to see those fields without knowing that the farmers are getting in their corn there as well as here; and it is impossible to think of that fact without reflecting, at the same time, on the example which the farmers of France hold out to the farmers of England. (*Rural Rides* I, 315–16)

The under-populated rural landscape becomes a signifier of an oppressive system. Churches are devoid of congregation, and a 'once populous village' shows 'indubitable marks of most melancholy decay' (*Rural Rides* II, 176). 'Unnatural changes' are responsible for the destruction of *sensus communis*: 'the long oak-table', a symbol of rootedness and communal values, ends up at the 'bottom of a bridge that some stock-jobber will stick up over an artificial river in his cockney garden' (*Rural Rides* I, 347). Further, representations of picturesque beauty that spoke of artifice are dismissed in one fell stroke: 'There was a *lion's mouth* spouting out water into the lake, which was so much like the vomiting of a dog, that I could almost have pitied the poor Lion' (*Rural Rides* I, 5).

The insertion of emaciated workers into the countryside not only critiques the Whig outlook of utilitarian improvement, but also threatens to expose picturesque landscapes of aesthetic and timeless values as ideologically suspect. Cobbett refuses to uphold aesthetic categories over economic ones. Thus, he 'cannot forget' Lord Abergavenny's sinecure, 'received of the public money', that allows him to buy his 'very pretty place' (*Rural Rides* I, 286). Landscape was first and foremost economic, both, as a bearer of class distinctions through exchangeability and the profit-controlled exploitation of labour, and also in its productive capacity within a geological framework of richness or poorness of soil. Daniel Green reports that only a year before he died, Cobbett wrote, 'I have, for my part, no idea of *picturesque beauty* separate from *fertility of soil* [...] if I must have *one* or *the other*, any body may have the *picturesque beauty* for me'.³⁰ But this bias towards fecundity—once again demonstrating Cobbett's preference for a materialist, rather than a philosophic or aesthetic outlook—is always tied up with the preservation of community (the girls in the field are always his standard), an ideal that rescues him from the disruptive apathy of output-oriented Enclosure movements.

Apart from defetishising the image of rural labourers, Cobbett's intense performative drive can also form a useful context in which to analyse the Romantic ideal of contemplative resignation from society and politics. At one level, Cobbett voices a similar faith in the capacity of the individual (rather than institutions) celebrated by the Romantics. But where Wordsworth as an author-as-

28. *Political Register*, 15 Mar 1826.

29. See Mulvihill's 'The Medium of Landscape in Cobbett's *Rural Rides*', *Studies in English Literature* 33:4 (Autumn 1993), 825–41.

30. *Great Cobbett: The Noblest Agitator* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), p. 31.

spectator praises the sublime beauty of the Lake District and its endowment of spots of time, in Cobbett we have something of a carnivalesque, physical engagement with nature that imparts a *material* kind of wisdom to the author-as-participant. The 'sand-hill' is the *topos* of Enlightenment where sport meets education,

the sort of education; and I am perfectly satisfied that if I had not received [...] that, if I had been brought up a milksop, with a nursery-maid everlastingly at my heels, I should have been at this day, as great a fool, as inefficient a mortal, as any of those frivolous idiots that are turned out from Winchester and Westminster School or from any of those dens of dunces called Colleges and Universities [...] (*Rural Rides* I, 125)

The philosophy of *vita activa* is portrayed as a tough moral choice between a practical obligation towards the community and a desire for retiring into the lap of nature. While appreciating Sir Thomas Winnington's beautiful estate, Cobbett dramatises this contradictory impulse in the following way:

'Well then,' says the devil of laziness, 'and could you not be contented to live here all the rest of your life; and never again pester yourself with the cursed politics?' 'Why, I think I have laboured enough. Let others work now. And such a pretty place for coursing and for hare-hunting and woodcock shooting [...] never, never again to be stifled with the smoke that from the infernal Wen ascendeth for ever more, and that every easterly wind brings to choke me at Kensington!' The last word of this soliloquy carried me back, slap, to my own study [...] and bade me think of the complete triumph, that I have yet to enjoy: promised me the pleasure of seeing a million of trees of my own, and sown by my own hands this very year. Ah! But the hares and the pheasants and the wild ducks! Yes, but the delight of seeing Prosperity Robinson hang his head for shame: the delight of beholding the tormenting embarrassments of those who have so long retained crowds of base miscreants to revile me[...] Yes, but, then, the flowers and the birds and the sweet air! What, then, shall Canning never again hear of the 'reverend and ruptured Ogden!' [...] Oh! God forbid! Farewell hares and dogs and birds! (*Rural Rides* II, 161–62)

This passage voices the multiple registers of a materialist approach. First, the optimistic activist critiques the despair of Romantic converts who buckled under an immense anti-Jacobin drive. Second, the prospect of picturesque landscape, worked upon by hired labour, is discarded for a more tangible and unmediated link with soil and 'trees of my own'. Finally, the ideal of civic duty, dramatised as the joy of bullying parliamentary villains into submission, gains preference over a secluded consumption of nature. As a practical counterpart to the heterogeneous narrative, praxis is dramatised at various levels, all of which contribute to the basic message of personal integrity and virtue. As a radical publisher and reformer Cobbett spent much of his time attending dinners and making speeches at Radical meetings, some of which are recorded in the *Rural Rides* with a special emphasis on his popularity with the working-class audience. Further, as a 'practical radical' Cobbett builds upon his agrarian experience to create a subplot within the narrative of Reform. Once again, not content to be the author-as-spectator who simply describes a rural landscape ravaged by the 'THING', Cobbett tells his readers how his straw-plaiting scheme and other horticultural programmes saved many labouring families from hunger, and made 'great additions to the wealth of the nation, introduced under the name of Cobbett'.³¹ Praxis is also advanced from a personal level of persuasion, where the speaker's character is shown to live up to ethical standards, commensurate with the demands of integrity. Readers are presented with a second narrative of private praxis: giving advice to 'poor assemblage[s] of skin and bones'; dissuading a crowd from

31. A survey of Cobbett's works reveals an astonishing number and variety of writings. Apart from political writings, there are works such as *Cottage Economy* (1821–23) and *Grammar of the English Language* (1800), which detail his contributions to gardening, farming and other domestic matters. Among other achievements he is also responsible for introducing a new type of locust tree to England, and a variety of 'Cobbett's corn'.

exacting revenge upon a poor cabbage-stealer; sacrificing bread and cheese to provide food for the hungry poor; or giving sixpence to a poor man 'under the pretence of rewarding him for telling [him] the way to Thursley, which [Cobbett] knew as well as he, and which [he] had determined, in [his] own mind, not to follow' (*Rural Rides* II, 24).

Space of Representation and Representation of Space

For modern readers, *Rural Rides*' seamlessness presents something of a shock encounter in the way it recreates a 'pre-modern' way of seeing, where *topoi* flow into one another, and the space of the body, physical landscapes, and political events form harmonic, yet rude counterparts of a unified social ethos. What is interesting is that while *Rural Rides* is weakened by Cobbett's self-gratificatory demon-martyr binaries, at the same time, as a narrative that rejects 'scientific' and 'abstract', albeit 'objective' languages, it embodies a synthetic spatial imagination that radically challenges the dehumanising effects of a purely 'speculative' method. In other words, though Cobbett's personality-based civic humanism shifts (and weakens, one might argue) the Radical idiom from Jacobin categories of 'principles' and 'rational enquiry' towards a more tangible and local, but incomplete, narrative of personal encounter and praxis, the same preference for a moral and material economy over abstract calculation generates a structure of perception that contests the exclusion of the hungry and emaciated worker within 'rational' configurations of space.

Here it is useful to place Cobbett's method of personal-political discourse against three paradigms of 'rationalism' that emerged out of the Enlightenment, as in William Hazlitt's analysis of the works of William Godwin, Thomas Malthus, and Jeremy Bentham provided in *Spirit of the Age* (1825). According to Hazlitt, the subversive appeal of William Godwin's 'rational' Jacobinism in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) was averted by a different register of reason as 'ratiocination' by Thomas Malthus, who in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) 'came forward with the geometrical and arithmetical ratios in his hands, and held them out to his affrighted contemporaries as the only means of salvation'.³² Further, in Jeremy Bentham's principle of 'utility' that configured the 'human mind [as] a map, rather than a picture',³³ Hazlitt saw the creation of what Henri Lefebvre would later call the 'abstract space' of rational society, which compels subjects 'to be content to see a space without conceiving of it, without concentrating discrete perceptions by means of a mental act, without assembling details into a whole "reality", without apprehending contents in terms of their interrelationships within the containing forms'.³⁴ Cobbett's narrative critically challenges these three versions of reason, examined by Hazlitt as the rational humanism of Godwin, Malthusian instrumental rationalism, and Bentham's abstract reasoning. Where Jacobin radicalism's 'rational' and contractual public sphere organised itself upon the transcendent appeal of 'principle, glorious principle, eternal, immutable principle',³⁵ Cobbett's strategy of immanence was built upon direct and unmediated encounters within a local field of oppression. Interestingly, Thomas Malthus (like Cobbett) rejects Godwin's 'speculative philosophy', and prefers a more tangible approach for ameliorating the condition of the rural worker. The early chapters of *Principle of Population* persuade the reader by deploying the same elements of sympathy and outrage that we find in Cobbett's *Rural Rides*, as may be seen from the following example:

32. William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age* (1825; New York: Doubleday, n.d), p. 135.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

34. *The Production of Space* (1974), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 313. David Harvey's analysis of the 'conception of time and space in the Enlightenment project' clarifies the critical leap between nineteenth- and twentieth-century 'rational' configurations of space, examined by Hazlitt and Lefebvre respectively—see his *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 249–53. Additionally, Michel Foucault's critique of Bentham's Panopticon project points to the aspects of isolation, surveillance, and self-regulation that Lefebvre identifies as the coercive arrangement of space in modern, capitalist societies, or what Habermas calls the 'bourgeois public sphere'—see Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), pp. 200–01.

35. Thelwall, p. 316.

The sons and daughters of peasants will not be found such rosy cherubs in real life as they are described to be in romances. It cannot fail to be remarked by those who live much in the country that the sons of labourers are very apt to be stunted in their growth, and are a long while arriving at maturity. Boys that you would guess to be fourteen or fifteen are, upon inquiry, frequently found to be eighteen or nineteen. And the lads who drive plough, which must certainly be a healthy exercise, are very rarely seen with any appearance of calves to their legs: a circumstance which can only be attributed to a want either of proper or of sufficient nourishment.³⁶

Whereas Malthus's landscape of hunger and want is subsumed under a mathematical determination that Poor Laws 'diminish both the power and the will to save among the common people, and [...] weaken one of the strongest incentives to sobriety and industry, and consequently to happiness', Cobbett's encounter with the poverty-stricken and rebellious worker raises the question, '[b]ut, who is to expect morality in a half-starved man, who is whipped if he do no work, though he has not, for his whole day's food, so much as I and my little boy snapped up in six or seven minutes upon Stoke-Charity down?' (*Rural Rides* I, 386–87).

As a narrator, Cobbett actively interacts with his characters and ends up relativising (or, as Mikhail Bakhtin might put it, 'novelising') not only Malthus' moral categories, but also Bentham's 'utilitarian' ones.³⁷ Against the disappearance of the political and ideological subject in Bentham's abstract concepts of individual 'pleasure' or 'pain', Cobbett creates a narrative that insists upon arguing and debating with the reader:

I met a man going home from work. I asked how he got on? He said, very badly. I asked him what was the cause of it? He said the hard times [...] 'Ah!' said he, 'they make it bad for the poor people [...]' 'They?' said I, 'who are they?' he was silent. 'Oh! No, no! My friend,' said I, 'it is not they; it is that Accursed Hill that has robbed you of the supper that you ought to find smoking on the table when you get home.' I gave him the price of a pot of beer, and on I went, leaving the poor dejected assemblage of skin and bone to wonder at my words. (*Rural Rides* I, 83–84)

The threefold challenge is accomplished by Cobbett's narrative in two ways. First, the *representation of space* in *Rural Rides*—the rapidly deteriorating physical and social landscape of England—from the perspective of the dispossessed worker challenges official descriptions of 'waust improvements' promoted by the Pitt ministry, and extends Jacobin arguments into the neglected countryside. But far more significant is the *space of representation* in *Rural Rides*, which is closely linked with Cobbett's narrative strategy. While the representation of space in *Rural Rides* compels the reader to look out of the text and respond to the commercial dystopia of England, the multilayered spaces of representation within the text create an intricate, interpretive web that allows the reader to move through various, interconnected facets of this dystopia, thus overturning Bentham's method of fragmentation, which, according to John Stuart Mill, 'treat[ed] wholes by separating them into their parts, abstractions by resolving them into Things, classes and generalities by distinguishing them into the individuals of which they are made up; and breaking every question into pieces before attempting to solve it'.³⁸

It is this double register of Cobbett's narrative that distinguishes him from another exponent of a politics of nostalgia in the nineteenth century, William Wordsworth. On the face of it, there is a lot in common between Cobbett and Wordsworth: both careers are marked by a rejection of the French Revolution and a dislike for speculative, calculative and abstract rationalism. Both turn towards the countryside to discover an authentic English community, and indeed we may argue that

36. Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798; New York: Norton, n.d. [1976]), p. 15.

37. See Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1975), trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

38. 'Bentham', *London and Westminster Review* (Aug 1838), 53.

both simultaneously elevate and limit the rural worker within their separate projects. Cobbett's condescension towards the deplorable objects of his benevolence is as suspect as Wordsworth's representation of the rural worker in his *Lyrical Ballads* as someone who is 'less under the influence of social vanity' and therefore an appropriate voice of a 'more permanent, and a far more philosophical language'.³⁹ But the insertion of the nineteenth-century *reader* shifts the equation in interesting ways. Jon Klancher points out that much of nineteenth-century writing was about the 'making' of English readers, 'who developed awareness of social class as they acquired self-consciousness as readers'.⁴⁰ The middle-class reader defined him/herself by forming a 'philosophy of one's encounter with the street and the city, with fashion, with social class, with intellectual systems and the mind's own unpredictable acts'.⁴¹ The *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* shows how Wordsworth contributes to the Romantic poet's work of 'generalizing the philosophic, interpreting mind for the active middle class', by

[c]hus[ing] incidents and situations from common life, and relat[ing] or describ[ing] them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, throw[ing] over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, mak[ing] these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.⁴²

As the middle-class reader moves through a variety of styles and voices in *Lyrical Ballads* in search of 'beautiful and permanent forms of nature', the combination of the humble and the sublime creates 'a representational language that 'signifies' the human apart from all its social and historical configurations'.⁴³ Thus, potential heteroglossia in Romantic narratives degenerates into 'a liberal, comforting pluralism'.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Klancher states that in radical discourse 'no voice is unsituated; each has a position, an argument, something to maintain'.⁴⁵ The dialogic aspect of the radical text also shapes a different kind of reader. Rather than the 'singular bond between reader and [Romantic] writer', the radical reader becomes an 'undetachable member of an audience contesting its position in social and cultural space'. The significance of *Rural Rides* lies in the active exchange between the writer, audience and the worker. Cobbett leads us into a domain that is at once organic and heteroglossic, where both writer and reader are always self-consciously situated within a moral and political economy, and where the worker's starving body, Lord Abergavenny's sinecure, haystacks on the 'anti-Jacobin field', Adam Smith, and Thomas Malthus are all shown to be seamless counterparts of the landscape of injustice symbolised by the Whig ethos.

Friedrich Engels would walk through the streets of Manchester a decade later to unearth the workings of political economy in a different landscape shaped by the Industrial Revolution in his *Condition of the Working Class in England*. Like Cobbett, Engels want to acquire a 'more than abstract knowledge' of the workers, in order to rescue them from the statistical and official descriptions of 'blue books'.⁴⁶ But the mode of encounter takes on a different meaning in Engels' proto-modern narrative that attempts to convert a mass audience of 'alienated monads' into the vanguard of Socialist Revolution. Where Cobbett's narrative forces the reader to reach an uneasy compromise

39. 'Preface to the Lyrical Ballads', in *Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Alexander B. Grossart (New York: AMS Press, 1990), p. 8.

40. Klancher, p. 40.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

42. Wordsworth, p. 8.

43. Klancher, p. 52.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

46. See *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), trans. W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner (1958; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), p. iv.

between the conflicting demands of ego and civic duty, Engels' narrative persuades and interpellates the reader through a scientific and objective language exorcised of all personal or subjective references. Though Cobbett may be guilty of converting every encounter into an exaggerated and self-referential narrative, his collapse of the private and public spheres is morphologically different from that of the 'bourgeois public sphere', whose organising principles of reason and calculation shun the intuitive and organic relationships of 'traditional' society.⁴⁷ For Lefebvre, any radical program that seeks redress from capitalism's 'rational' society has to first address the spatial architectonic of modernity that emerged out of the Enlightenment's obsession with measurement and quantification, represented by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer as the 'machinery of thought' and the 'zeal of laboratory' that homogenised people and places,⁴⁸ and by David Harvey as a method of 'perspectivism' that allowed space to be conceived of as 'usable and malleable'.⁴⁹ If the production of space in 'rational' societies is dominated by the 'totality of the visible', Michel Foucault reminds us that this modern spatialisation was predicated upon a 'double silence: the relative silence of theories, imaginings, and whatever serves as an obstacle to the sensible immediate; and the absolute silence of all language that is anterior to that of the visible'.⁵⁰ Against this double silence I invoke the double significance of Cobbett's spatial imagination that too was shaped by a 'totality of the visible'. Against the silencing of all that 'serves as an obstacle to the sensible immediate', Cobbett deploys the sanction of tradition and its ideal of organic selfhood. Against the silencing of 'all language anterior to that of the visible' he develops a dialectical structure of perception that converts discrete visual data into the dynamic language of totality, and orients readers towards a hermeneutic of synthesis.

47. I borrow the categories of 'rational' and 'traditional' society from Habermas, who defines it in the following way: 'The expression "traditional society" refers to the circumstance that the institutional framework is grounded in the unquestionable underpinning of legitimation constituted by efficacy of cultural traditions. This is the basis for the 'superiority' of the institutional framework, which does not preclude structural changes adapted to a potential surplus generated in the economic system but does preclude critically challenging the traditional form of legitimation'—*Towards a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics* (1968–69), trans. J. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 95. While Cobbett constructs himself within epic narratives, we may perhaps contextualise him within a contentious confrontation between 'rational' and 'traditional' values in nineteenth-century Britain. Against the drive towards a utilitarian and scientific domination of nature conducted under auspices of calculative reason, whose full effect continues to unfold even today, Cobbett argues fiercely and passionately for the values of a 'traditional' society. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (especially pp. 45–50), Habermas identifies the rise of the bourgeois public sphere as the displacement of 'traditional' society by 'rational' paradigms, with the creation of a split between public (the 'rational-critical' space) and private (the space of family conjugality and intimacy) that was simultaneously reproduced in the altered space of the house (which architecturally created 'more room for the individual but left less room for the family as a whole'), as well as the rise of the psychological novel in England in the eighteenth century (which itself altered the relationships between the author, the work, and the public, by creating 'intimate mutual relationships between privatized individuals who were psychologically interested in what was "human", in self-knowledge, and in empathy').

48. *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1947), trans. John Cumming (1973; New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 15.

49. Harvey, p. 284.

50. *Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (1973; New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 108.

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