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Philosophy and Society: Melville's Modernity

by

Eric Mendelsohn

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in English in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
of New York.

1995

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date

Dwight Ryness
Chair of Examining Committee

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Date

Jeff West
Executive Officer

Morris Dickstein
Gulgen Barish

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

Philosophy and Society: Melville's Modernity

by

Eric Mendelsohn

Advisor: Professor David Reynolds

The dissertation places key works by Herman Melville in the "mass society" tradition of social criticism, whose influence on American literature has been overlooked. Among the eclectic mass society themes, I focus on the idea that modern, competitive societies, because they lack inherent unity, foster "fictional" forms of unity including mass culture, whose strong political role Melville depicts. In Typee, the social principles of the tribal Typees, which correspond both to the older community or Gemeinschaft and to the dreams of utopian socialism, appear to the narrator to be an authentic alternative to what sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies called the "imaginary and mechanical" Gesellschaft, or society. The novel's ambiguous ending, however, suggests that by idealizing the tribal community the narrator fails to escape the "imaginary" Gesellschaft and actually participates in a mass culture obsessed with symbolic "savages."

In Moby-Dick, Melville pursues themes related to mass society, including the repudiation of Hume's skepticism--because it yields the "whiteness of the whale"--the ambiguities of Emerson's idealism, and the regressive

psychology of the masses. Anticipating Gustave Le Bon's theory of the crowd, Ahab invokes the "law of mental unity"; he diverts the idealist symbol to politics; now the symbol--the whale--attracts the "savage" energies still circulating in the unconscious of the "detribalized" crew and welds them into unity. Moreover, Melville links Ahab to mass cultural forms--revivalism, alcoholism, Jacksonian democracy, and mesmerism--to indicate, as Le Bon will, that mass culture and politics merge in modernity.

Ahab's crowd psychology portends the larger polity of the mass public, which extends the "laws" of the crowd to all of society. In "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids," Melville puts the thinking of the public, its "common sense," into crisis on many levels including the thermodynamic. Common sense assumes the objective necessity of its world and represses its arbitrary underpinnings; in contrast, Bartleby's inability to work anticipates Henry Adams' "dynamic theory of history." Like Adams, Melville renders the nothingness of mass society in terms of its ultimate entropy.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor David Reynolds for his encouragement and support, Professors Morris Dickstein and Evelyn Barish for serving as readers, Professor Amy Tucker and Paul Mendelsohn for reading and commenting on versions of the manuscript, my beautiful daughters, Emma and Pauline, above all, Dominique Polfliet, my beloved, long-suffering wife.

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Introduction:
The Mass Society Paradigm

I

That Herman Melville had some significant relation to mass culture has long been acknowledged, but exactly what mass culture was to him is not yet established.¹ Part of the problem is that a whole pattern of hugely influential ideas is missing from discussions of nineteenth-century American literature, the so-called mass society tradition, which takes theoretical shape in the writings of Ferdinand Tönnies, Gustave Le Bon, Gabriel Tarde and Henry Adams, among many others. Melville's fictions reflect the defining events of nineteenth-century mass society thinking, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, the defining figures, Napoleon and Andrew Jackson, and its foremost exemplar, the mass cultural democracy of the United States. Melville knew the intellectual sources of mass society thinking: Carlyle's romantic critique of modernity, the nineteenth-century anthropology of "primitive" life, and mediating between, the theory of mesmerism. And he reached its central conclusion: modernity is dystopian.

In his encyclopedic survey Mass Society, Salvador Giner identifies many nineteenth- and twentieth-century figures in the mass society tradition, from reactionary critics of modernity like Nietzsche and Le Bon, to leftists like Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, to liberals, like Alexis de

Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, increasingly troubled by the "mode by which the majority was linked to the institutions of the new order" (Giner 43).² From similarly disillusioned liberal perspectives the classic sociologists--Ferdinand Tönnies, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Emile Durkheim--produced a critique of modernity whose themes--rationalization, charisma, community, society, disenchantment, solidarity, and so on--are deeply ingrained in contemporary thought.³ Many other artists, writers, philosophers and intellectuals of all kinds shared the mass society perspective, as Giner amply shows.

The themes of the mass society tradition are too various to easily summarize. Mass society thinking is in the first place a theory of modernity; it begins with the eruption of modernity against the backdrop of traditional society. It attends to the new "collectivities"--the mob, the crowd, the masses, the public--which reconstruct aspects of traditional society on a modern basis. It includes the pathologies of the masses: disenchantment, mediocrity, alienation and dehumanization. It examines the new political forms of democracy and totalitarianism and the new elites which manipulate the masses. It emphasizes the loss in modernity of community and self. It distinguishes between the rationality of means and the irrationality of ends characteristic of mass society. Finally, mass society thinking focuses on new forms of consciousness--the unconscious and mass consciousness--the former a residue of "primitive" life, the latter the creation

of the manipulative agencies of mass culture and mass media. I allude in this essay to many of these themes; mostly I focus on the idea that modern social forms, in order to reproduce themselves following what Karl Popper calls "the dissolution of the tribe" (242), forge fictional unity.

II

In the mass society tradition, the comparison of tribal and modern societies, or as Tönnies will say, Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society), reveals what Tönnies calls the "imaginary and mechanical" structure of modernity, in contrast to the "real and organic" community (33). According to Tönnies, the Gesellschaft is mechanical because it is founded upon competition and thus has no "a priori" unity. It is imaginary because to reproduce itself, it must impose unity, which, since the Gesellschaft has no "a priori" unity, must be imaginary. Thus Tönnies traces the operations of the various fictions--politeness, economic value, natural rights, public opinion--that impart a semblance of unity to the Gesellschaft. For Tönnies, the ordinary sociality of the Gesellschaft is itself fictional, inasmuch as it appears to be sociality when in truth its goal is always the gratification of self-interest. This perception of a society held together by fictions and by a delusive sociality anticipates the theory of mass culture.

In mass society thinking, in spite of the "dissolution of

the tribe," tribal "energies" are seen to persist in the masses, forming a kind of social unconscious, abruptly visible in the eruption of the crowd, as described by Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon's analysis of the crowd shows that to forge "imaginary" unity the Gesellschaft must address the mass unconscious; it must develop means adequate to it, such as the symbol. The symbol functions in the context of the "dissolution of the tribe." In "primitive" societies, explains Karl Mannheim, the "taboo and collective formation of symbols" keeps the "free expression of impulses . . . in check . . . and directed towards certain objects and actions which benefit the group." But in modernity "the impulsive energies which have been set free by the disintegration of [tribal] society . . . are seeking integration about a new object." Thus "contemporary mass-societies" strive to direct "impulses which the revolutionary period unchained . . . towards prescribed wish-objects" (64).

Modern politics, then, is always a politics of displacement. In mass society, elites must rule in the name of the masses; they must direct the unchained impulses of the masses to symbolic objects that bypass their conscious minds, excite their "savage" unconscious and weld them into unity. Inevitably, mass politics bleeds into mass culture, which also directs mass energies to cultural symbols, a potent form of displacement in its own right, and a model for a general politics of symbolic displacement.

As increasingly mass culture dominates society, there is a shift from Le Bon's crowd psychology to Gabriel Tarde's theory of the public as a "spiritualized crowd." The public, the normal polity of modernity, wholly manufactured by the mass media, extends the "laws" of crowd psychology to society as a whole, which responds to the repetition of simple formulas in the press as the crowd responded to the emotion-laden symbolic language of the leader. The dominance of the press forms the basis of the modern polity, a new, especially flexible mode of psychological incorporation, which even generates pseudo-subversive activities in the form of mass culture, as a kind of homeostatic mechanism.

It seems to me that Melville's writings adhere to the logic of this "paradigm." Melville's first novel, Typee, shows in terms comparable to Tönnies great work both the "dissolution of the tribe" and the rise of the "imaginary and mechanical" Gesellschaft. Indeed, in Typee, the very idealization of tribal life partakes of the "imaginary" quality of a mass culture obsessed with highly symbolic "savages." Then, Moby-Dick, anticipating Le Bon, shows tribal or "savage" energies to persist in the masses, forming a kind of social unconscious subject to political manipulation by Ahab. Ultimately, Ahab's metaphysics are subverted by his crowd psychology, his rule over his crew of "isolatoes," who, set free by the "dissolution of the tribe," seek integration around a new object, which Ahab offers them. Representative

of modern elites, Ahab directs the crew's unchained impulses to their one true romantic object, the white whale. In Ahab, mass politics bleeds into mass culture; he rules the crew with alcoholism, "savagism," mesmerism, and mysticism--the entire panoply of sensationalism.

Ultimately, such political manipulation constructs a conventional common sense, the final form of psychological incorporation, represented by the narrator of "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street." From Moby-Dick to "Bartleby" there is a shift from crowd psychology to social psychology, from the physical to the spiritual crowd, or public. In his oft-proclaimed common sense, the narrator of "Bartleby" adheres to formulas that through repetition have come to seem inevitable. The scrivener's copying, in contrast, refers to social processes that mold individuals in their social identities; that the narrator fails to perceive such processes testifies to the success of mass formulaic thinking. Bartleby emerges as a paradoxical manifestation of the innermost logic of the Gesellschaft, the final phase of its "imaginary and mechanical" existence.

At the same time, Melville's writing refers to a philosophical narrative which has ceased to strongly influence our interpretation of the nineteenth-century but which strongly did his. As is well known, Melville wrote amid a revival of idealist metaphysics which sustained an argument against John Locke, especially his theory of ideas. What is less often

remarked is that the rejection of Locke was driven by fear of David Hume, whose critique of causality was said to have brought about the dualism of subject and object and thereby annihilated the foundations of morality, religion and common sense. Hume was the primary figure in the crisis of belief with which Melville is often associated. Philosophical idealism sought to repair the damage wrought by Hume, to heal the rift between subject and object, to restore religion and morality, to defend the reality of the physical world, to preserve the idea of an universal intelligence.

In his works, Hume adduced the force of repetition against what remained of intuitionism in Locke's critique of innate ideas; in the nineteenth century, repetition was identified with industrialism and mass media. Rebelling against mass society, Melville's major characters, Tommo, Ishmael, and Ahab, also confront the crisis of belief unleashed by Hume's skepticism: Tommo by idealizing the "noble savage," in the fashion of utopian socialism, Ishmael by undertaking an Emersonian search for spiritual facts, and Ahab by asserting the whale's intelligent malice, thereby reverting to the anthropomorphic metaphysics of personification. But each fails at the intersection of metaphysics and mass culture: Tommo's idealization of the Typee collapses in the discovery of its mass cultural basis; Ishmael's search for spiritual facts leads him to Ahab's mass cultural politics; Ahab, to realize his metaphysical ambitions, is forced to

enter mass politics. In the end, the narrator of "Bartleby," representing a return to common sense, the formation of the mass public, emerges as the "solution" to the skeptical crisis.

A closely related theme of the present essay is the discovery of the unconscious in Moby-Dick as the basis of Ahab's rule. The unconscious refers to archaic or "primitive" drives and needs that, ungratified by an individualistic, rationalistic modernity, still circulate in the form of free-floating "energies." Ultimately Melville's "theory" of the symbol rested on an analogy between politics and the popular pseudo-science of mesmerism, since both sought to attract and conduct the archaic "energies" that persist in the mass unconscious. This perception anticipates both Gustave Le Bon's crowd psychology, itself crucially influenced by mesmerism (through its successor, hypnosis), and Freud's "discovery of the unconscious," itself indebted to hypnosis and to Le Bon.

Finally, energy itself emerges as a crucial metaphor in Melville's fiction. Aton Mesmer translated electrical science into spiritual healing; Le Bon, translating mesmerism into crowd psychology, retained the sense of energy transfers. In Moby-Dick, Ahab dominates the crew with methods evocative of both mesmerism and electrical science, as if to show that modern politics was not reasoned discourse but the attraction, accumulation, circulation and discharge of social energy. In

"Bartleby" and "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," the model is no longer electrical science, but the prestigious science of thermodynamics, upon which Henry Adams was to erect his "dynamic theory of history." These stories, I argue, anticipate Adams's theory; like Adams, they pose a dualism of the first and second laws of thermodynamics, of, on the one hand, equilibrium and conservation, on the other, entropy and annihilation. Thus, like Adams, Melville makes his final criticism of mass society in terms of entropy, Bartleby's inability to work.

III

If the influence of mass society thinking on American literature has not been properly documented, it is in part because of the hostility of younger critics such as Andrew Ross, who dismisses the "well-known, conspiratorial view of 'mass culture' as imposed upon a passive populace like so much standardized fodder, doled out to quell unrest and to fuel massive profits" (4). In his essay on cultural theory, John Clark examines the debate between the older "cultural pessimists" of the mass society tradition and the contemporary "cultural populists." The former, Clark says, stress the power of cultural production to mold its audience (30); its model is totalitarian, deterministic and pessimistic. In contrast, "cultural populists" like Ross insist on the relative autonomy of cultural consumption and the creativity

of the audience, arguing that these, to some degree, evade the repressive logic of mass cultural production. At the heart of this innovation in cultural theory is a revolution in the theory of the sign: because the pessimists supposedly adhere to an archaic theory of the sign as determinate meaning, they exaggerate the power of representations to impose meaning; in contrast, the populists grasp the intrinsic "polysemy" of the sign which is then said to exceed the repressive logic of cultural production.

In fact, mass society thinking recognizes the intrinsic "polysemy" of the sign, but refuses to valorize it. Rather, since the concept of the masses implies a dispersion of interests that must then be bound together, for the mass society pessimist, the sign's polysemy is its repressive logic: it both allows for diversity and folds that diversity into "imaginary" unity. In mass society thinking, the power of the sign, or symbol, derives not from its determinate meaning but from its "polysemy," what Ishmael calls an "indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what" it meant (12-13). Only the empty portentousness of the symbol, the absence of determinate meaning, unifies the dispersed masses.

The point of this essay, however, is not the validity of mass society thinking, but its influence. Its influence is wrongly ignored by those "New Americanists" who argue that the

classic American fictions, in spite of their ambiguity, always, as Myra Jehlen says, "lead us back to society" (Bercovitch, Ideology 125), effecting in their very "indeterminacy," argues Jonathan Arac, a kind of closure by folding diverse interpretations into the process of "consensus" ("Politics" 249).⁴ The Scarlet Letter, for example, writes Sacvan Bercovitch, "elicits personal response in order to allow each of us to contribute to the expanding continuum of liberal reciprocity" ("Ambiguity" 641). The "office" of the symbol is to "control" the tendency of "historical facts" to fragment by "ordering the facts into general polarities," thereby making "fragmentation itself" a "function of consensus" (644). The symbol makes "our very search for meaning the vehicle of our accommodation to society" (650).⁵

Thus the New Americanists turn the "theory" of the mass cultural sign found in the classic books against those books. The classic authors reproached mass culture for making fragmentation a function of consensus; as Theodore Parker sermonized, the merchant "sends rum and missionaries to the same barbarians, the one to damn, the other to 'save,' both for his own advantage" ("Merchants" 100). Books like Moby-Dick demonstrate repeatedly the idea that "indeterminacy" provides "closure." The New Americanists simply identify these demonstrations of the work of the symbol with the classic novel itself, arguing that such books not only

represent "ideologically mediated realities," they also reenact "the strategies by which liberalism established its dominance in antebellum America" (Bercovitch, "Ambiguity" 652). But it is hard to see exactly where representation passes into reenactment, at what point the book begins to participate in the "mediated realities" it describes. In effect, New Americanists appropriate the theory they use to batter its (classic) authors.

Moreover, there is, James Duban writes, a tendency to "conflate the outlook of Melville and that of his narrators," especially among "critics who relegate the seemingly subversive tendencies of American Renaissance writers to a de facto participation in--and attendant perpetuation of--consensus ideology" ("Melville's Narrators" 343). This fallacy mistates the function of narrators like Tommo and Ishmael who embark upon the idealist quest to avert skepticism. With these narrators, Melville objectifies, not endorses, romantic idealism, demonstrating that in modernity, idealist metaphysics converge with mass culture and mass politics.

There is also a tendency among critics of Melville to separate his metaphysics from his politics and his politics from his view of mass culture. But Melville's metaphysics cannot be divorced from his politics, for unlike his characters, he does not undertake a search for metaphysical truth. Rather, juxtaposing the philosophical rejection of the

Enlightenment with a society that seems to manifest the mechanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, Melville shows the social role of metaphysics. Ultimately, Tommo's utopian socialism, Ishmael's Emersonian dialectics, and Ahab's vitalist metaphysics, serve the mechanistic philosophy of the Enlightenment, which triumphs in the form of mass society.

And if mass society has philosophical significance, mass culture, its dominant feature, has great political significance; strangely, then, two powerful new "Melvilles"--Michael Rogin's and David Reynolds's--completely miss one another. For Rogin, Melville is a "recorder and interpreter" of a "crisis of bourgeois society at midcentury" (ix); for Reynolds, he is witness to a "radical infusion of the imaginative" into mass culture (xv). In contrast to these critics, mass society thinking highlights the way the "radical infusion of the imaginative" in mass culture--which resembles in its operations what we have come to think of as the Freudian unconscious--solved the "crisis of bourgeois society" that traditional bourgeois politics could not. In the present essay, some works of Herman Melville illuminate, and are illuminated by, mass society thinking.

Notes

1. The received idea that Melville rejected American mass culture has lately been challenged by David Reynolds. In his Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville, Reynolds introduces a "mass cultural" Melville, whose work is not a "rejection of socioliterary context," but its "assimilation and transformation" (xv). Although my "Melville" is less assimilating than Professor Reynolds's, this study is greatly indebted to his fine achievement.

2. Giner makes the diverse mass society tradition manageable, tracing its origins in antiquity and showing its influence on postmodernism. The pattern of ideas, or paradigm, to which I refer is not specified in his book but is generally implied. There are many books in the mass society tradition, but surprisingly few about it. Patrick Brantlinger in Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay, offers a history and critique of mass society thinking. Serge Moscovici's The Age of the Crowd examines the considerable impact of crowd psychology on modern politics.

3. Historical criticism of the novel has generally invoked Marxist concepts; Weberian sociology also illuminates much about many nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors closely attuned to the process of rationalization and disenchantment. For one version of neo-Weberian criticism, see Anthony Cascardi, The Subject of Modernity.

4. See Jehlen's introduction to Ideology and Classic American Literature, which she edited with Sacvan Bercovitch; and Sacvan Bercovitch, "The A-Politics of Ambiguity in The Scarlet Letter." See Empire for Liberty for Wai-chee Dimock's exposé of Melville's "poetics of individualism." For two critiques of the New Americanists' historical exposés, see Emily Miller Budick's "Sacvan Bercovitch, Stanley Cavell, and the Romance Theory of American Fiction," and Donald Pease's introduction to "New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon," a special issue of boundary 2.

5. Strangely, Bercovitch's exposé leads him to a "distinction between Hawthorne's concept of process and Emerson's." On the one hand,

it is the office of Hawthorne's critique of radicalism to demonstrate how all this can be brought under control--his authorial control and our interpretive control--if the dangers of multiplicity are represented through the lens of symbolic bipolarity. ("Ambiguity" 644)

On the other hand,

for Emerson and his heirs (in the optative-oppositional mood), pluralism is open-ended and process a continuing effort to resist authority. . . . Potentially, therefore, it opens us to conflicting ideas of society--alternative visions of community, history and the self--whether residual (within the culture) or available through various forms of adversarial imagining or analysis. (644)

This seems puzzling. When Bercovitch writes that "by definition all polarities are symbolic and all symbols tend toward reconciliation" (644), he seems directly to target Emerson, who writes in "Fate" that "if evil is good in the making"--that is, symbolic of good--"we are reconciled" (345).

Chapter One:

From Utopian Socialism to Mass Culture: The Failure of Typee

I

In their tendentious reactions, positive and negative, antebellum critics aptly put Herman Melville's Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life in a radical socialist tradition. But if radicals hailed the "noble savage" and the criticism of modernity, while conservatives bewailed the "libel" on the missions and the idealization of the "savage," both camps obscured the ambivalence of the ending, when Tommo, threatened with tattooing, escapes the tribe and returns downheartedly to the West.¹ Subsequent critics have come to focus on the ending; many have agreed with Milton Stern that for Melville the primitive "finally becomes both undesirable and impossible."² For Stern, the "primitive" is ultimately an evasion of selfhood and history; when Tommo flees the Typees, he goes home, according to Stern, to seek his identity as "action in history" (8).

However, Stern ahistorically ignores the Fourierist movement, whose principles the Typees seem to confirm to Tommo. The tribe is a community, and far from an evasion of history, the idea of community rallied the communitarian reformers to "action in history." If in Typee the "primitive" proves "impossible," the fault is not with the tribe but with Tommo whose idealization of the primitive participates in a general regime of the symbol which Melville identifies with

mass culture.³

II

Melville wrote Typee as the United States, the country that "realized" the Enlightenment, was in the throes of romantic counter-enlightenment. "In one generation," writes Henry Steele Commager, Americans were able "to work a revolution out of the philosophy of Locke, and, in the next, out of a philosophy that repudiated Locke" (9).⁴ Perry Miller has emphasized the political pressures fueling the increasingly idealist cast of antebellum political culture. The revivalists, for example, frankly "announced their engine as a means of mobilizing . . . 'public opinion'" (68). The missions, off-shoots of the conservative "empire of benevolence," turned the reformist zeal that otherwise would flow to radical causes outward, toward the degraded "savage."⁵ The sentimental justifications that Typee's missionaries offer for imperialism echo arguments American conservatives formulated to avoid the political liabilities of appeals to self-interest in mass society.

In contrast, Tommo echoes the American followers of French socialist Charles Fourier, the Associationalists, who, led by Albert Brisbane, enlisted thousands of devotees, converted Horace Greeley and the Transcendentalists at Brook Farm, and established almost thirty phalanxes, or communes, in the United States.⁶ For the Associationalists, existing

institutions distorted human nature and spawned the countless miseries of civilization bemoaned by Tommo. Their solution was to banish the "vast machinery of repression both physical and spiritual" and to install "in their stead an order adapted to the real nature of man" (Brisbane 193). Typee reflects the pervasive imagery that "linked Association to the return of a lost Edenic paradise," for as one Associationalist "devotee" of Typee and Omoo wrote, we were "ALL BORN HARMONIANS BEFORE WE WERE EDUCATED AS CIVILIZEES" (qtd. in Guarneri 137).

In the end, however, Tommo's discovery in the tribe of its "machinery of repression"--the tattoo and the taboo--disrupts his idealizing perception of the Typees; it turns out that Tommo, like the missionaries, has made the native "into a symbolic carrier of the world view [he] embrace[s]" (Herbert 159). As the symbolism of "noble" or "ignoble savages" derives not from some intrinsic moral content but from the appeal to public opinion, Tommo cannot claim to have extricated himself from the society represented by the Dolly; rather, his idealism directs him to the "radical" pole of its symbolic mass politics. Thus Typee indicates the overwhelming, inescapable nature of modernity and the futility of idealist alternatives.

III

The modern age, Feuerbach declared in 1843, preferred "the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original,

the fancy to reality, appearance to essence" (xxxix).⁷ The preference for appearances characteristic of modernity arises with the fading of traditional social roles; as competition becomes the norm, society seems to lose its "essence"; increasingly, "appearances" seem to substitute for the older sociality, a diagnosis one finds in Typee, where the French colonialists and evangelical missionaries destroy the "organic" community of the natives and impose religious and political appearances.

In his classic, Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, Ferdinand Tönnies also juxtaposed the primitive communities revealed by nineteenth-century anthropology with modern society. Contrasting two "ideal types" of human association--one "real and organic," the other "imaginary and mechanical" (33)--Tönnies deftly characterized the modernity he associated with the United States, "the most modern and Gesellschaft-like state" (221).

For Tönnies, the traditional Gemeinschaft or community was older than the Gesellschaft or society. Representing group life, the Gemeinschaft was sustained by the emotional identification of individuals with one another, by their empathy and solidarity, their economic cooperation, their religious unity. In the Gemeinschaft, Tönnies writes, all individuals "remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors" (64), guided by the "natural will," the impetus to undertake actions on behalf of the group as a

whole. Their sociality is an end in itself, not a means to an end.

In the course of history, the Gemeinschaft is overtaken by the Gesellschaft, an "artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings" (64). One goes into the Gesellschaft as Melville's protagonists go to sea, exiled into transcendental homelessness. Unlike the Gemeinschaft, the Gesellschaft possesses no "a priori and necessarily existing unity" (64); there are no actions which "manifest the will and the spirit of the unity even if performed by the individual; no actions which, in so far as they are performed by the individual, take place on behalf of those united with him." To the contrary, "everybody is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others" (64-5). The impersonal Gesellschaft substitutes contractual relations for family relations, replaces religion with opinion, and is characterized by the dominance of the "arbitrary" or "rational" will, the drive to realize individual self-interest.

Driven by competition, the Gesellschaft nevertheless "superficially resembles the Gemeinschaft in so far as the individuals live and dwell together peacefully" (64). Unlike the unity of the Gemeinschaft, however, the unity of the Gesellschaft is purely fictitious. If individuals in the Gesellschaft remain "essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors," these "uniting factors" have no social basis

and must take "imaginary" forms: the fiction of "value," of "politeness," and so on. Applied to "public opinion," Tönnies's notion of "imaginary" unity prefigures the theory of mass culture. An "imaginary" version of "the original . . . common life and communal will," public opinion retains something of its Gemeinschaft-like basis." Ultimately, however, public opinion is manufactured by the commercial press, in which "judgements and opinion are wrapped up like grocers' goods and offered for consumption in their objective reality" (221). For Tönnies the press presaged a purely psychological polity prefigured in the United States, "a single world republic, coextensive with the world market, which . . . could dispense with means of coercion other than those of a psychological nature" (221).

Because public opinion, and mass culture in general, retain something of their Gemeinschaft-like basis, they speak to the loss of community in modernity. Roy Harvey Pearce remarks that the "savage" arises in American mass culture upon his near extermination: "The Indian who was important to Americans . . . was not the person but the type, not the tribesman but the savage, not the individual but the symbol" (73). The destruction of the Indian community liberates its symbolic value as a representation of community and of Gemeinschaft qualities uncontaminated by self-interest and exchange-value. Similarly, in Typee, as the imperialists dissolve the tribal community, they free up tribal imagery,

whose manipulation and refashioning becomes the basis of both the colonial polity imposed on the natives and of the campaign for public opinion at home. Melville indicates that such an expropriation of symbolic values proceeds by analogy with the expropriation of economic value, indeed, forms a single process, dissolving the tribe, forming the Gesellschaft, and masking the latter in the imagery of the Gemeinschaft.

IV

When we are introduced to Tommo aboard the Dolly, we encounter the contractual association characteristic of the Gesellschaft. For Tönnies the contract typified the Gesellschaft's paradoxical social relations. As individuals enter into contractual relations for their mutual satisfaction, the contract forms a social bond. But as through contractual relations these individuals only satisfy their individual wants, not their mutual sociality, their sociality is really an asocial negation of sociality. Thus for Tönnies the contract formalized the generalized hostility of the Gesellschaft.

Tommo's ship, the Dolly, whose name refers to the artificiality of the sailors contractual association, evinces the absence of a priori unity in the Gesellschaft. As Tönnies would say, "everybody is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others" (64-5). Tommo complains of the lack of physical and emotional

nourishment, of the protraction and purposelessness of the voyage, and of the violation of the ship's articles.

The captain was the author of these abuses; it was in vain to think that he would either remedy them, or alter his conduct, which was arbitrary and violent in the extreme. His prompt reply to all complaints and remonstrances was--the butt end of a hand-spike, so convincingly administered as effectually to silence the aggrieved party. (31)

The captain does not, as Thomas Scorza argues, betray the "social contract" and the "natural rights philosophy" that founds the Dolly's society (228). To the contrary, contractual relations spawn his debased authority, impersonally conferred upon such brutal mediocrities, whose behavior exposes the empty nominalism of a philosophy that deems all human beings "rational persons and free agents" and thus "equal," when, in reality, the capitalists are the "masters and rulers" of the Gesellschaft (Tönnies 83). In their nominal equality, the sailors consent to the labor contract only to discover that, given the real "difference in the power of two parties," the contract is a fiction; as Tönnies remarks, "Apparently it is a contract, but in actuality it is coercion and abuse" (254). And so, the masses, as Tommo says of the sailors, are "a parcel of dastardly and mean-spirited wretches, divided among themselves, and only united in enduring without resistance the

unmitigated tyranny of the captain" (31).

V

For the sailors of the Dolly, the only relief from the miseries of contractualism are the "refreshments"⁸ routinely scheduled by the captains of the whalers--the orgy in the bay of Nukuheva, when Marquesan women swarm aboard and the ship is

wholly given up to every species of riot and debauchery. Not the feeblest barrier was interposed between the unholy passions of the crew and their unlimited gratification. The grossest licentiousness and the most shameful inebriety prevailed. (25)

This passage mimics the temperance reformers who assailed the pervasive alcoholism of the American working class (D. Reynolds 127). Such rhetoric implied an equation that took a "theoretical" form in Le Bon's crowd psychology--of the crowd, the alcoholic, and the "savage." For Le Bon, the Gemeinschaft's destruction leaves in the modern individual a residue of "savage" impulses and desires which ordinarily go unsatisfied in the Gesellschaft, but which are partially gratified in the crowd, where the individual "possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings" (58). Similarly, in their "refreshment," the sailors, tapping into the tribal energies of the Marquesans, recover a demonic collectivity.

To Le Bon, the crowd portended a reversion to "primitive

communism which was the normal condition of all human groups before the dawn of civilization" (16). To prevent this catastrophe, Le Bon recommended that the state gratify the savagism of the masses with organs of mass culture, especially the theater. For Le Bon, the obviously "imaginary" quality of theatrical representations evoked and discharged pent up emotions without transforming them into dangerous acts. In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass similarly describes the drunken holidays set aside for the slaves "as conductors, or safety-valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity." Such occasions were, he writes, "among the most effective means . . . in keeping down the spirit of insurrection" (76). Strongly impressed by the fashionable subject of energy, the antebellum political imagination saw the need for such "conductors, or safety-valves" to carry off subversive discontents before they coalesced politically.

Similarly, antebellum sensationalist fiction specialized in shockingly cynical assaults on a corrupt, hypocritical elite, calculated to attract powerful undercurrents of mass discontent, only to dissipate this social rage in nihilistic "intoxication." Detractors like William Ellery Channing assailed sensationalism for gratifying the public's "love of strong stimulants," its craving "to be stimulated, to be excited" by books that can be "run through with a railroad rapidity, which give a pleasure not unlike that produced by exhilarating draughts" (qtd. in D. Reynolds 178).⁹

Sensationalist literature, "deliberately subversive in both the stylistic and political sense" (171-2), as Reynolds writes, ultimately served as a safety valve for social pressures just as, in Typee, the "refreshment" dissipates the combustible energies of the sailors and reconciles them to a parched contractualism.

VI

In contrast to the pseudo-subversive debauchery of the crew, the French colonialists and American missionaries suggest sentimental formulas.¹⁰ The satire on the French fleet emphasizes its fondness for appearances. Its admiral, Du Petit Thouars, is, in contrast to the "original magnitude and grandeur" of the naked "savage," the "semblance of all that is elevated and grand" (40). In their campaigns, the French always maintain a "critically correct appearance. . . . purposely calculated to dazzle the islanders" (27). To manipulate French public opinion, the colonialists make the natives symbols of "the beneficial effects of their jurisdiction." In effect, they transform the natives into mass cultural symbols. The king and queen of Nukuheva, dressed for a reception by the "tailors of the fleet," their appearance "certainly calculated to produce an effect," are, upon their grand entrance, hailed by the military band, which strikes up "'The king of the Cannibal Islands'" (15-16).

So it is by a "shameless subterfuge" that Mowanna, king

of Nukuheva, "whom the invaders by extravagant presents have cajoled over to their interests, and move about like a mere puppet," is denominated the

rightful sovereign of the entire island, -
 -the alleged ruler by prescription of
 various clans who for ages perhaps have
 treated with each other as separate
 nations. To reinstate this much-injured
 prince in the assumed dignities of his
 ancestors, the disinterested strangers
 have come all the way from France. . . .
 If any tribe shall refuse to recognize
 the authority of the French, by bowing
 down to the laced chapeau of Mowanna, let
 them abide the consequences of their
 obstinacy. (28)

Even as they suppress the communal polity, the French mask themselves in its imagery, a satire on the "imaginary" unity of the Gesellschaft and the tendency of elites to govern with appearances derived from the older Gemeinschaft.

VII

The missions, meanwhile, raised the specter that haunted many nineteenth-century intellectuals, that religion could be manufactured for the masses.¹¹ Unnoted in discussions of Melville's religious views, the idea that Christianity was mutating into mass culture was exemplified for him as for Carlyle by the missionary societies--"religious machines," Carlyle called them, "supported by collection of moneys, by fomenting of vanities, by puffing, intrigue and chicane; a

machine for converting the Heathen" (475). Intellectuals feared that the state would manipulate religious symbols; for example, Kierkegaard's existentialism takes shape against "the illusion that Christianity and State have been amalgamated" (127). Religion, declared Kierkegaard, entails "heterogeneity to this world" (112), but "Christendom" is a "statistical phenomenon" and thus "the province of the state--to say that there are a million Christians is to admit that there are none" (127). To its critics, "Christendom" portended a new mode of social integration based on the psychological appeal of appearances. Feuerbach argued that the Church, in order to impart "faith" to the "ignorant and indiscriminating multitude," had substituted for religion "the appearance of religion," "the external signs of the faith . . . the simulated religious indignation of the present age, the age of shows and illusion" (xxxix).

In the United States, conservative intellectuals idealized Enlightenment political economy; similarly, the missionaries in Typee sentimentalize their exploitation of both the native and the sentimental audience. Tommo describes the missions as mass phenomena that "originate in certain tea-party excitements," the idealist counterpart to the delirium of the alcoholic crowd, only the sentimental crowd is "under the influence" of "benevolent-looking gentlemen" who "solicit alms . . . towards the creation of a fund, the object of which is to ameliorate the spiritual condition of the Polynesians"

(230). "In the abstract," Tommo assures the sentimental reader, the missions are a "just and holy cause." In practice, however, the fund enriches the missionaries and ravages the natives, who are "civilized into draught horses, and evangelized into beasts of burden. . . . harnessed to the vehicles of their spiritual instructors like so many dumb brutes!" (231). Impoverished by the imperialists, the "'savages' are made to deserve the title" (37); meanwhile, with sentimental "accounts of missionary hardships, and glowing descriptions of conversions, and baptisms taking place beneath palm-trees," the missionaries mask their theft and brutality and solicit funds (234).¹²

Like the French, the missionaries make the natives conform to mass cultural stereotypes. One such is "King Kammehammaha III," whose "most trivial movements" the "republican missionaries of Oahu cause to be gazetted in the Court Journal, published at Honolulu." Although the king is a "most inveterate dram-drinker," the missionaries enroll him in "the Hawaiian Temperance Society." Recorded in "English and American journals," Tommo continues, accounts of the king's activities "lead the reader to infer that the arts and customs of civilized life are rapidly refining the natives of the Sandwich Islands." But, Tommo insists, such imagery arises from the "dissolution of the tribe":

The resources of the domineering chiefs are
 wrung from the starving serfs . . . so that

the measure of gew-gaw refinement attained by the chiefs is only an index to the actual state of degradation in which the greater portion of the population lie groveling.
(222)

The sentimental appearance is really an "index" to the "actual" ruin of sociality by the "enlightened individuals" who dispossess the natives of the "spontaneous fruits of the earth," convert them "into nominal Christians," and "clamorously announce the progress of the Truth." Now, "cut off . . . from their natural supplies," the natives "are told by their benefactors to work and earn their support by the sweat of their brows!" (230-1). In this manner, Typee retraces the dispossession of the Gemeinschaft and the substitution for it of a system of appearances.

VIII

Among the alternatives to the Gesellschaft broached in the nineteenth-century were the systems of Henri Saint-Simon, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, which Marx and Engels called "critical-utopian socialism" (514).¹³ Fourier exerted the greatest influence on the antebellum scene. In his wide-ranging excoriation of the many evils of commercial civilization, Fourier invoked the "profound contempt of the barbarians" and "the irony of the savage," whose "strongest imprecation against an enemy is to wish him our fate," words which for Fourier "may be regarded as a malediction uttered by

Nature itself" (Selections 82):

The savages are truly free men, and any industrial system which they reject is contrary to the designs of God. The form of industry which we offer them . . . fails to satisfy the impulses given by Providence to those who are closest to nature. (Utopian Vision 209-10)

The "impulses given by Providence to those who are closest to nature" manifest the universal force of "attraction," the spiritual equivalent of Newton's gravitation:

Attraction is the divine guide of the stars and the animals and it suffices to place them in harmony. . . . Where is the unity of the divine system if the mainspring of the general harmony, attraction, is not just as applicable to human societies as it is to the stars and the animals, if attraction cannot be applied to the agricultural and manufacturing industries which are the pivot of the social mechanism? (Utopian Vision 212)

According to Fourier, human nature encompassed twelve basic passions, instinctual drives that are distorted and suppressed by civilization, "diverted from their true object," Charles Gide puts it (Selections 18). To bring civilization under the purview of the "Divine Social Code" (Utopian Vision 210), Fourier detailed a new social institution, the Phalanx, or commune. In the Phalanxes, the "passional attractions" would be redirected to their natural objects; as a result, social

relations would be infused with a general benevolence. To all this, Fourier added the complete liberation of the sexual attractions, a mystical rationalism, and other visionary excesses (Guarneri 17-19).

Led by Albert Brisbane, American Associationalists applied Fourier's critique of civilization to American society. The result was the most thoroughgoing indictment of social ills produced by any of the reforms. Unlike the other reforms, the Associationalists gave a structural account of American ills, arguing that the competitive system had degenerated into a generalized war of all against all, as manufacturers and merchants, from behind a veil of nominal equity and justice, vied among themselves to exploit labor and to rob the public (Guarneri 100-1). The United States, they warned, had embarked upon a course destined to produce the evils of European industrialization; the inevitable outcome would be a new feudalism of unfeeling corporations. The Associationalists denounced official politics as a "universal system of demagogueism" (Charles Dana qtd. in Guarneri 112). In the phalanx, however, humanity could shake off the evils of competition and replace them with communitarian principles based on the law of attraction.

As Americans imported Fourierism to the United States, they inevitably modified it, as Guarneri stresses. Keeping its critical edge, they made Fourierism more acceptable to the American public by stripping it of Fourier's sexual and

speculative excesses and stressing its "practical" aspect. Emphasizing the psychological and moral toll exacted on all classes by competition, the Americans tended to turn Fourierism into a kind of health reform. To make it more attractive to a country in the throes of an idealist revival, the Associationalists drew from traditional Christianity and from Swedenborgian mysticism to give Fourierism a spiritualist cast it originally lacked. Finally, Associationalism, despite its radical critique of American society, incorporated many contradictory American ideals, thereby giving the appearance of magically resolving the tension between the individual and society, between capitalism and socialism. But precisely because Associationalism absorbed so much of antebellum political culture, it muted its radicalism and rendered itself vulnerable to absorption, and in the end came to resemble the conservative socialism of those who would, wrote Marx and Engels, redress "social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society" (513).

IX

Typee reproduces the "critical-utopian" structure of American socialism, matching every criticism of the Gesellschaft with a utopian feature of the tribal Gemeinschaft.¹⁴ When Tommo discerns among the Typees an innate human faculty keyed to the universal order, he like Fourier refers to "the impulses given by Providence to those who are

closest to nature." If the "sensationalist school" of the Enlightenment, as Theodore Parker wrote, reduced morality to expediency and convention, saying that "nothing is good of itself, right of itself, just of itself" ("Transcendentalism" 71), the transcendentalists contrastingly affirmed "that man has moral faculties which lead him to justice and right, and by his own nature can find out what is right and just, and can know it and be certain of it" (79). Where the sensationalists saw, in Tommo's phrase, the "inborn lawlessness of the human race" (235), transcendentalists and utopians cast the human being in nature as innately benevolent.

Upon encountering the Typees, Tommo at first wavers between confidence in and skepticism about the impulses of those "closest to nature," painfully, since his life depends upon such impulses: "Was it possible that, after all our vicissitudes, we were really . . . at the mercy of . . . a fierce and unrelenting tribe of savages?" He allows that he had been "kindly and hospitably entertained." But he cannot escape the idea that "beneath these fair appearances the islanders covered some perfidious design" (95), that death "under all these smiling appearances, might yet menace us" (119). Unable to believe that such "deferential kindness" can be offered without a reciprocal demand, Tommo must undergo a conversion to idealism to restore his confidence in humanity.

As Tommo plunges deeper into melancholic lethargy, the

utopian impulse takes shape, seemingly to avert the skeptical crisis. Immediately after he first truly experiences that he is "indeed a captive in the valley" (144), he exchanges his Western clothing for "the Typee costume, a little altered, however, to suit my own view of propriety, and in which I have no doubt I appeared to as much advantage as a senator of Rome enveloped in the folds of his toga" (145). Soon after, he again is "sunk insensibly into that kind of apathy which ensues after some violent outbreak of despair"; at that moment, he begins "to experience an elasticity of mind which placed me beyond the reach of those dismal forebodings to which I had so lately been a prey" (148).

In this "altered frame of mind," he says, "every object that presented itself to my notice in the valley struck me in a new light, and the opportunities I now enjoyed of observing the manners of its inmates, tended to strengthen my favorable impressions" (151). Tommo perceives that the native enjoys a "happier, though certainly a less intellectual existence," than the European; that "in a primitive state of society, the enjoyments of life, though few and simple, are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed; but Civilization, for every advantage she imparts, holds a hundred evils in reserve" (149); that in Typee "there were none of those thousand sources of irritation that the ingenuity of civilized man has created to mar his own felicity"; that there was "no Money!" (151); and so on. Every criticism of civilization is paired

with a utopian feature of the tribe. The personal, family-like social ties of the Typees exemplify natural laws of association, rooted in their closeness to nature, whose abundance is distributed evenly among the members of the tribe, so that nature and society form a harmonious equilibrium. There is little disparity of wealth, no jealousy and intrigue, no "arrogant pretensions." Political authority treads lightly, for "little more than a slight difference in costume" distinguishes the "chiefs from the other natives" (219). Women are especially well treated. The unfettered sexuality of the Typees connects the "passional attractions" to their natural objects; the joyfulness of the Typees limited labor exemplifies the Fourierist doctrine of "attractive" work. Tommo will "frankly declare, that after passing a few weeks in this valley of the Marquesas, I formed a higher estimate of human nature than I had ever before entertained" (238).

In this receptive frame of mind, Tommo appears to resolve the problem of cannibalism. He suggests that the idea of cannibalism is taken up by sensationalist "popular fictions" which portray "unfortunate voyagers . . . lured into smiling and treacherous bays; knocked in the head with outlandish war-clubs; and served up without any preliminary dressing." So "horrific and improbable" are these "extravagant fictions" that they provoke misguided sentimental reactions among those readers who "will not believe that any cannibals exist."

Purporting to extricate himself from the false dualism of the sentimental and the sensational, Tommo avers that "Truth . . . is again found between the two extremes," arguing that cannibalism exists, but "upon the bodies of slain enemies alone" (241).

Above all, Tommo admires the Typees for their collectivity:

There was one admirable trait in the general character of Typees which, more than any thing else, secured my admiration: it was the unanimity of feeling they displayed on every occasion. With then there hardly appeared to be any difference of opinion upon any subject whatever. They all thought and acted alike. . . . They showed this spirit of unanimity in every action of life: every thing was done in concert and good fellowship. (238)

Unlike the denizens of the Gesellschaft, the Typees do not enter into social life for self-aggrandizement; rather, they live for their sociality. As Tönnies would say, the Typees are "essentially united" (65); their social life manifests what Tönnies calls the "natural will." In contrast to the "rational" or "arbitrary" will of the Gesellschaft, which is "prior to the activity to which it refers and maintains its separate identity," the "natural will" is "immanent in activity" (103). Whereas the self-consciousness rational will, always calculating the effects of its actions, never undertakes actions for their own sake, the actions undertaken

by the "natural will" express the prior unity of the group and are meaningful in themselves. Because the Typees do not derive the meaningfulness of their physical lives from the "imaginary" construct of a "separate identity," their social lives remain "real and organic."

Marked by the absence of the "rational will," the social life of the Typees is older than the "discovery we have made that we exist," the calamity that Emerson in "Experience" called the "Fall of Man" (269). Tribal life embodies the epistemology of the Gemeinschaft, the naive belief in the reality of the objects of our perception that obtained before the Enlightenment separated the subject from the object and stranded the subject in an all-encompassing but unverifiable subjectivity. The Typees, to adopt Emerson's phrase from "Experience," live in what they see (269); there is among them no distinction between the idea and the thing, appearance and being. Their virtue is not "clamorously invoked"; it is "unconsciously practiced" (226). Their lives and beings appear utterly guileless and transparent:

The lively countenances of these people are wonderfully indicative of the emotions of the soul, and the imperfections of their oral language are more than compensated for by the nervous eloquence of their looks and gestures. I could plainly trace, in every varying expression of their faces, all those passions which had been thus unexpectedly aroused in their bosoms. (169-70)

Even the Typees's language seems to promote the transparency of their social lives, for many of their words are of such general application that "the particular meaning [is] shown chiefly by a variety of gestures and the eloquent expression of the countenance" (261). Their orality anchors the word to the personal relationship of the communicants, to the modalities of their bodies, to the social context, so it cannot slip free and exert autonomous force to shape social relations, as it does in the Gesellschaft.¹⁵

Thus, resolving the enigma of the Typees's motivations, Tommo can make the central affirmation of this section of Typee: if the "islanders . . . without the aid of established law . . . exhibit, in so eminent a degree, that social order which is the greatest blessing and highest pride of the social state," then

it must have been by an inherent principle of honesty and charity towards each other. They seemed to be governed by that sort of tacit common-sense law which, say what they will of the inborn lawlessness of the human race, has its precepts graven on every breast. The grand principles of virtue and honor, however they may be distorted by arbitrary codes, are the same all the world over: and where these principles are concerned, the right or wrong of any action appears the same to the uncultivated as to the enlightened mind. It is to this indwelling, this universally diffused perception of what is just and noble, that the integrity of the Marquesans in their intercourse with each other is to be attributed. (235)

Like Fourier, Tommo, on the basis of "the impulses given by Providence to those who are closest to nature," affirms the universality and objectivity of moral ideas and attests to the community which manifests them.

X

Before long, however, Tommo's faith in the universality and objectivity of moral ideas collapses. When the desire of Karky, the tattoo artist, to practice his craft on Tommo's white skin spreads to the tribe as a whole, Tommo suddenly deduces that the tribe was "resolved to make a convert" of him. The specter of conversion suggests that Typean values are bound up with Typean life in ways that finally militate against their universality. Stripped of its universality, tribal life no longer delights him and all his "former desire to escape from the valley now revived with additional force" (256).

It seems now that tribal fraternity arises not from nature but from the compulsory inscription of the tattoo. The imagery of Karky "working away for all the world like a stone-cutter with mallet and chisel" (253) derives, not from nature, but from forms of artifice: manufacture, art, and writing. Previously Tommo had praised the orality of the Typees. Tattooing, however, is a kind of writing; the significance of its arbitrary pattern is contractual, not natural, not substantive, but reflecting what Horkheimer and Adorno call

the "first categories" of thought, not thought so much as power, nothing more than "the organized tribe and its power over the individual" (21-2).

Moreover, the tattoo alludes to the sensationalist psychology of the Enlightenment, to Locke's tabula rasa, which Melville evokes in the "The Tartarus of Maids," when the narrator suddenly thinks "of that celebrated comparison of John Locke, who, in demonstration of his theory that man had no innate ideas, compared the human mind at birth to a sheet of blank paper; something destined to be scribbled on" (1276-7). Unlike innate ideas--the object of Locke's critique--the tattoos of the Typees are not "graven" on their breasts; rather, like Locke's ideas, they are "scribbled" across organs of sense perception, the ears, noses, mouths and especially the eyes of the Typees. Thus the tattoo suggests cultural determination through the senses, by the mechanical principles of empirical psychology, and not the organicism of intuitive morality.

Again, when Tommo jokes that some of Karky's implements were "mysteriously curved, as if intended to be introduced into the orifice of the ear, with a view perhaps of beating the tattoo upon the tympanum" (254), he puns on the other meaning of the word "tattoo"--a short, repetitious drum beat--applied, here, to a sense organ. The beating of the tattoo on the ear drum anticipates the imagery of the "drum beat to quarters" in Billy Budd, an adjunct to what the narrator of

that story calls "true martial discipline." Such repetitious discipline, the narrator points out, "long continued superinduces in average man a sort of impulse whose operation at the official word of command much resembles in its promptitude the effect of an instinct" (1430). The figurative beating of the tattoo on the ear drums of the Typees also superinduces impulses that resemble instincts, which in fact Tommo has mistaken for "the impulses given by Providence to those who are closest to nature."

Ultimately, the very "beating" of the tattoo refers to what Horkheimer and Adorno call the "power of repetition over reality" (12) proclaimed by the Enlightenment, a "principle of immanence" that militates against the fundamental principle of both the "mythic imagination" and metaphysics--the "projection onto nature of the subjective" (6). By asserting the "power of repetition" to transform contingent particulars into the pseudo-universals of myth and metaphysics, the Enlightenment undercut all forms of organicism, all attempts to invest nature with intelligence, and substituted for such illusions a purely mechanical principle.

The power of repetition, then, leads the Typees to mistakenly invest the "still more important system of the taboo" with the metaphysical quality of an "all-controlling power," whose effects are

wide-spread and universal, pervading the
most important as well as the minutest

transactions of life. The savage, in short, lives in the continual observance of its dictates, which guide and control every action of his being. (257)

The Typees heed the taboo with a promptitude that resembles an instinct. But when Tommo cannot connect the dictates of the utterly "capricious" taboo to any "inherent principle of honesty and charity," or "tacit common-sense law," or "universally diffused perception of what is just and noble," then he can no longer argue that "the grand principles of virtue and honor," if apparently "distorted by arbitrary codes," are in reality "the same all the world over" (235).¹⁶

To the contrary, Typean society is, like all societies, founded on an arbitrary code, from which arises its "instinct" for good and evil. Typean society then cannot resolve the skeptical crisis, for it does not manifest universal intelligence.

Tommo, then, reverts to the skeptical crisis about appearances, sociality and morality that had led him to idealize the Typees. His faith in universal morality gives way to a "riot" of "horrid speculations"; again "an uncontrollable desire to penetrate the secret so jealously guarded" (269)--the truth of their cannibalism--torments him. No longer can he decide if the "mysterious impulse" animating the Typees is benevolent or if it merely masks the "inborn lawlessness of the human race." He cannot choose 'transcendentalist morality over sensationalist debunking.

Now, all appearances are again potentially false: "What could be their object in treating me with such apparent kindness, and did it not cover some treacherous scheme?" (276-7).

XI

In this ambiguous conclusion, we sense Melville's deep hesitation about utopian reform in mass society. Shattering Tommo's faith in universal, "indwelling" values, Typee's ending echoed those critics of Associationalism who charged that "beneath its rhetorical cover the phalanx was a mechanism for assuring cooperative behavior rather than an expression of communal solidarity." Among the Typees, not communal solidarity, but two mechanisms, the taboo and the tatoo, assure cooperative behavior; in other words, the appearance of organicism in tribal life is in reality formed by atomistic and mechanistic means. American critics of utopianism similarly perceived a disparity "between the Associationalists' aspirations for community and the forms they intended to embody it: the goal was organic, the means to achieve it atomistic and mechanistic" (Guarneri 138).

At the root of these accusations was the critics' perception that utopianism participated in mass society more than fundamentally opposed it. Thus L. L. and Jessie Bernard, historians of American social science, discern a tension between the "ponderous metaphysical significance" Associationalism attributed to Attraction and the actual

discussion of Attraction. In theory Attraction was God's "one unitary law for his universe"; in practice it resembled "the codes of modern advertisers and propagandists." If Associationalists pledged to restore the "natural passions," they actually sought to condition "desired responses through the manipulation of the natural passions [my emphasis]" (79). That utopian socialism was manipulative suggests that, like the "refreshment," it actually served to stabilize the Gesellschaft by diverting the political energies of the masses to imaginary, symbolic solutions.

In Typee, modernity, as Adorno writes in Prisms, "surrogates the meaning which [it] has exterminated," including the meaning of community. Like the "transcendent criticism of culture," as Adorno calls romantic idealism, Tommo purports to choose a "standpoint outside the sway of existing society," according to the principles of idealism. But for Adorno, this is no longer possible, for today ideology means not conscious belief, but "society as appearance," a society dominated by mass culture. Like all idealists, Tommo "speaks the language of false escape," that of the "nature boy." In modernity, however, every perception passes through mass culture; every idealist symbol leads to mass culture. Ultimately, "the choice of a standpoint outside the sway of existing society is as fictitious as only the construction of abstract utopias can be" (31). In the end, the "imaginary and mechanical" quality of the Gesellschaft envelops even the

utopian vision.

Finally, then, Tommo's discovery of social mechanisms falsifies utopian organicism, suggesting that utopian socialism works like mass culture in general: its penetrating critique of the Gesellschaft attracts Tommo's political energies but ultimately dissipates them in the abstract metaphysical idealization of the "primitive." With this perception, Melville echoes a widespread suspicion that utopian socialism was pseudo-subversion. Marx and Engels wrote that while the utopians criticized "every principle of existing society," in reality they only dreamed up "duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem" (516), and came finally to embrace that "conservative bourgeois socialism" which seeks to redress "social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society" (513). Typee similarly indicates that the idealization of the "primitive," of the "noble savage" in a state of "nature," can only, at best, disguise the mechanistic apparatus of mass society and at worst, serve it, as we shall see in Moby-Dick.

Notes

1. Milton Stern's introduction to Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Typee places Typee's reception in the context of "an ideological opposition of conservatives and progressives, between traditionally recognizable amalgams of allegiance and orientation in 'right' and 'left.'" To the left, "money, missionaries, and the modern represented brutalizing capitalist civilization, and the primitive represented peace, love, communitarianism, nature, serenity, goodness, and sane humanity"; the right, in contrast, depicted "the primitive as raw, animalistic, depraved, and unenlightened, and civilization as good and redeeming" (7-9).

2. The imagery of the "noble savage" arose as Europeans associated the newly discovered tribes of Oceania, North America and Africa with the conventional idea of a "golden age." Comparing the corruptions of a complex civilization to the "primitive" virtue of the "savage," disaffected intellectuals like Montaigne, Diderot and Rousseau formulated the familiar charges against civilization. The comparison with the "primitive" passed into the more formal economic, social and epistemological periodizations of the nineteenth-century. The attraction of the "primitive" continued to influence mass culture and modern art, most often as an emphasis on archaic psychological drives submerged in modern consciousness. On primitivism see Michael Bell, Primitivism, and Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism.

3. This is to say that what Tommo shares with the missionaries is their propensity to transform the native into a symbol, not their racism. As Bruce Harvey remarks in his "Precepts Graven on Every Breast": Melville's Typee and the Forms of Law, " American Quarterly:

Recent critics, schooled in the dangers of ethnocentric 'othering,' have chided Tommo for failing to sustain an initial sympathy for the alien ways of the Typee tribe. . . . [They] challenge, and in essence condemn, Tommo for the poverty of his ethnographic method. (394)

Harvey cites John Samson, who in White Lies: Melville's Narratives of Facts, condemns Tommo's

condescending narrative, which labels the natives 'poor savages' who are 'unsophisticated and confiding,' does as much as the sailors' promiscuity to foster the 'contaminating contact.' The whites' narration of encounters with the South Seas natives, Melville demonstrates through his deconstructive tactics, is a stumbling block to a truer perception of the natives and

thereby promotes racism. (56)

It seems to me that more than Tommo's "racism," the paradoxes of idealization doom the primitivist idyll.

4. In his introduction to The Era of Reform: 1830-1860, Commager remarks that in Britain, "it was the Utilitarians and the Rationalists--the heirs of John Locke--who were the reformers. Perhaps the simplest explanation of the otherwise mysterious failure of Utilitarianism to play any significant role in America is that in America Utilitarianism was called Transcendentalism" (9). See Daniel T. Rodgers's discussion of the "puzzling failure" of "Utility" in America in Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence, 17-44.

5. In 1802 Alexander Hamilton, joking or not, seemed to foretell the emergence of the benevolence societies, recommending that conservatives "renounce our principles and our objects, and unite in corrupting public opinion till it becomes fit for nothing but mischief. . . . Let an association be formed to be denominated "The Christian Constitutional Society" (qtd. in H. Schneider 99). Perry Miller, in The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War, shows that the religious revivalists and the "metaphysical lawyers" who constructed a "legal sublime" consciously adhered to this strategy.

6. This account is drawn from Carl Guarneri's The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America. For their discussion of Associationalism, see L. L. and Jessie Bernard, Origins of American Sociology: The Social Science Movement in the United States. On American utopianism more generally, see John Humphrey Noyes, History of American Socialisms, Arthur Eugene Bestor, Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian Origins and Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829, Ira L. Mandelker, Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America, Donald Drew Egbert and Stow Persons, eds., Socialism and American Life, Robert S. Fogarty, American Utopianism, and Morris Hillquit, History of Socialism in the United States.

7. In On Photography, Susan Sontag writes that Feuerbach's

premonitory complaint has been transformed in the twentieth century into a widely agreed-on diagnosis: that a society becomes "modern" when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images, when images that have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality and are themselves coveted substitutes for first-hand experience become indispensable to the health of the economy, the stability of the polity, and the pursuit of private happiness. (153)

8. Samson reports that "most ships stopped every six months for 'refreshments,' a term that quickly became a sexual euphemism" (42).

9. In Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization, T. Walter Herbert cites to similar effect an article in New-York Evangelist, entitled "Beware of Bad Books!": "'Indiscriminate novel reading' is 'intoxicating and poisonous, and excites a thirst for what is maddening and destructive'" and produces "'mental delirium tremens'" (183).

10. The dualism of the sentimental and the sensational structures many aspects of Melville's work; ultimately, he seems to agree with Theodore Parker, who sermonized that the merchant "sends rum and missionaries to the same barbarians, the one to damn, the other to 'save,' both for his own advantage" ("Merchants" 100).

11. On religion as mass culture, see Patrick Brantlinger, Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay.

12. Herbert writes similarly:

What Melville sees in the interaction between missionaries and islanders in the South Seas is a process where the grand abstractions espoused by the missionaries produce a distortion of native life that justifies and facilitates a system of economic oppression whose results appear to vindicate the abstractions that sponsor them. (174)

13. In Critique of Other Socialisms, Hal Draper reviews Marx's critique of utopian, reactionary, and sentimental socialisms, and the socialism familiar to students of the antebellum period of "economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind" (Marx and Engels 513). Attracting revolutionary passions, frittering them away on imaginary politics, these socialisms seem to function like mass culture.

14. David Reynolds is the only critic to notice that "in its heterogeneity, [Typee] was more broadly inclusive of variegated reform attitudes than any American novel written to this point" (128).

15. Orality as described by Walter Ong is the epistemology of the Gemeinschaft, since it entails that ideas are not separated from their objects, that objects derive their meaning from the intersubjectivity of the group, that communication is personal, and so on. The contrast between orality and literacy is the

sociolinguistic difference between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.

16. Herbert writes similarly:

Instead of finding a life of psychic freedom among the Typees where "the grand principles of virtue and honor" hold sway amenably with his own deepest impulses, Tommo now has to contend with efforts to draw him into an alien and confining social structure. . . . Instead of joining in the communal life wholeheartedly, he is compelled once again to calculate his reactions in order to increase the chances of escape. (170)

Tommo, Harvey writes, perceives that "it is not the natural or interior 'common-sense law' that regulates the Typees, but an inexplicable, finely nuanced network of taboos that has no discernible foundational principle guiding it" (414). In contrast, Samson continues to sentimentalize the Typees: "In the valley, all meaning relates ultimately to the taboo, which is 'all encompassing,' that is to say, which is the system of nature itself" (50).

Chapter Two:

Ishmael, Emerson's Dialectic, and the Symbol

I

Unlike Tommo, Moby-Dick's protagonists are not reformers. If Ishmael does invoke reforms like temperance and anti-racism, most critics identify him with the more philosophical voice of the sea-faring chapters, where his sensitivity to the moral and philosophical meaning of natural and social facts seems politically neutral. As a philosopher, Ishmael seems exceptionally aware of the "relativity of symbolic meaning" (McSweeney 39), of multiple meanings; many critics then contrast his awareness to Ahab's rage to impose "allegorical control and determinate meaning" (Rogin 108). In this manner, Moby-Dick is made to speak to current critical controversies, with Ishmael cast as a proponent of indeterminacy, and Ahab as a totalitarian essentialist.

In fact, Ishmael, no less than Ahab, seeks "determinate meaning," although by different means; to argue otherwise is to abstract from antebellum philosophy, which was in vigorous recoil from the Enlightenment theory of ideas.¹ It was almost universally affirmed that Locke's theory of ideas had led to Hume's skepticism and that skepticism had annihilated the foundations of religion, morality and even reality; to avert skepticism, to restore religion, morality and the reality of the universe, antebellum idealism reverted to metaphysical themes of essence, necessity, and intuition, all of which

intend "determinate meaning." Ishmael is an idealist; if he appreciates "the relativity of symbolic meaning," it is only because, following Emerson, he seeks to fold such partial meanings into the higher unity of the symbol. For Ishmael and Emerson, skepticism about determinate meaning is only the negative phase of dialectical affirmation; in the end, we must, says Emerson in "Experience," "take in" negations or "skepticisms" and make "affirmations outside of them" (269).

Like Ishmael, Ahab rejects the mechanical principle of Enlightenment, Locke's psychology and Hume's skepticism. But whereas Ishmael makes affirmations out of negations, Ahab, asserting the intelligent malice of the whale and denying the possibility of a random collision of unintelligent forces, resurrects a metaphysical concept of causality. Indeed, his metaphysics partake of the origin of all metaphysics, the primal urge to personify the world, to transfer sentiment and intelligence to nature, which David Hume denominated with the rhetorical term "prosopopeia." Ahab's "prosopopeia," his personification of Moby Dick, stands against the reduction of the world to a machine, which he like Ishmael opposes.

So both Ahab and Ishmael seek to impose "determinate meaning." However, Ahab is distinguished from Ishmael by his contradictory relationship to enlightenment, to which he is metaphysically opposed but practically compliant. Resistance to enlightenment leads Ahab to the "fiery hunt"; the hunt brings him into mass politics. Ahab objectifies his

metaphysics in crowd psychology; his very intensity focuses the energies of the crew on him; he functions as a leader of the crowd, providing symbolic unity among diverse individuals. Thus the name Pequod evokes, first, the "dissolution of the tribe" (Popper 242)--the extermination of the Pequod Indians--and, second, the rise of the pseudo-tribe, or crowd, figured in the Pequod's "isolatoes" who, divested of tribal bonds, invest their "savage" energies in Ahab. Ahab stands, then, on two legs simultaneously, the living, "organic" leg of metaphysics, and the dead, "mechanical" leg of politics.

But since Moby-Dick, like Typee, is about the limitations of its narrator's idealism then we must begin with Emerson's philosophy, which I argue is also Ishmael's. The problem of the relationship of Moby-Dick to Emerson's thought is an old one; most often Ahab is construed as an apocalyptic version of Emerson's "self-reliance"; I argue, to the contrary, that Ahab explicitly repudiates Emerson's theory of the spiritual fact. Other critics cite, as I do, Emerson's influence on Ishmael's symbol-making; most of these then conflate Ishmael with Melville. I argue, to the contrary, that Melville, by surrounding Ishmael's story with Ahab's, shows the fate of Emersonian idealism in mass society.

II

In "Experience," Emerson confronts stubborn social and philosophical facts, or negations, arising generally from the

Enlightenment, and specifically from Locke's theory of ideas, which Emerson calls "the very unhappy . . . discovery that we have made that we exist." To Emerson, the theory that we perceive ideas, not objects, is

the Fall of Man. Ever afterwards we suspect our instruments. We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorting lenses which we are, or of computing the amount of their errors. (269)

The theory of ideas, as is well known, induces skepticism about the existence of objects and the objectivity of moral ideas.² Perhaps, says Emerson, ideas "have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects." This discovery of the creative power of ideas amounts to disenchantment:

Once we lived in what we saw; now, the rapaciousness of this new power, which threatens to absorb all things, engages us. Nature, art, persons, letters, religions, objects, successively tumble in, and God is but one of its ideas. (269)

As a consequence of disenchantment, moral ideas have no objects: now, "every evil and every good thing is a shadow which we cast" (269).

In this light, Emerson can hardly celebrate the subjectivity that arises from enlightenment, for it is a

"system of illusions [which] shuts us in a prison of glass which we cannot see" (258). Mass politics are equally unpromising, a "vertigo of shows and politics" (262), dominated by those Emerson, in "Fate," calls the "Fultons and Watts of politics" (345), the "theoretic kidnappers" who wind each man "round his finger by knowing the law of his being" ("Experience" 258). One such was Napoleon, inventor of mass politics, to whom "the world is a problem in mathematics or the science of quantity" (270).

Confronted by all these negations, Emerson declares that he will "take them in and make affirmations outside of them." For these "skepticalisms are not gratuitous or lawless"; rather, they are the "limitations of the affirmative statement." "Out of unbeliefs," Emerson insists, "a creed shall be formed," comprising the "skepticalisms as well as the faiths of society" (269).

Now, Emerson accepts his "actual companions and circumstances, however humble or odious, as the mystic officials to whom the universe has delegated its whole pleasure for us" (262). Now, Napoleon is one of the "mind's ministers," whose unbridled subjectivity yields a significant, partial truth, "a telescope for the objects on which it is pointed" (271). Now, "something is earned . . . by conversing with so much folly and defect. . . . Whoever loses, we are always of the gaining party. Divinity is behind our failures and follies also." He discovers now a particle of Power,

"which alights nowhere, but hops perpetually from bough to bough . . . which abides in no man and in no woman, but for a moment speaks from this one, and for another moment from that one" (260).

III

Arguing in "Fate" that if "evil is good in the making, then we are reconciled" (345), Emerson reconciled himself to enlightenment and mass society. Ishmael, setting out on his whaling voyage, is, like Emerson, "quick to perceive a horror," and also would reconcile himself to it, be "social with it . . . since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in" (7). To do so, Ishmael practices the Emersonian art of grasping evil as good in the making, of making affirmations out of negations, of deriving spiritual facts from natural. In "The Chapel," for example, Ishmael and Queequeg witness a scene of unmitigated grief:

A muffled silence reigned, only broken at times by the shrieks of the storm. Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and incommunicable. . . . There these silent islands of men and women sat steadfastly eyeing several marble tablets, with black borders, masoned into the wall on either side the pulpit. (34)³

The illiterate "noble savage," Queequeg, gazes serenely upon

the Whaleman's Chapel, but the dismal scene, evocative of the lonely individuality of the Gesellschaft, horrifies Ishmael: "What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith" (36). But then, taking in the scene's negativity and inverting it, Ishmael affirms that "Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope" and soon he "grew merry again" (37).

In this procedure, Ishmael and Emerson follow Goethe, for whom, said Simmel, the "idea is inherent in the phenomena." Rather than reject science, Goethe fused it with poetry and fashioned a "sensitive empiricism" (qtd. in Van Cromphout 37). Goethe, Emerson and Ishmael seek, not the nonsensuous Platonic idea, but the idea in the sensuous fact. In "The Masthead," the Pantheist, represents another kind of idealism, for he does not study the phenomena but merely imposes on "the mystic ocean at his feet" the idea of the "deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature." For Ishmael the Pantheist's kind of idealism fatally obscures the sensuous fact: "While this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch, slip our hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. . . . Heed it well, ye Pantheists!" (159). Rather than ignore the vortices, Ishmael admonishes, one must take them in, discover their affirmative "idea."

Ignoring the sensuous fact, the "Pantheist" is merely the

sentimental opposite of Captain Sleet, with whom he is juxtaposed in "The Masthead." The alcoholic scientist, "not so much immersed in those profound magnetic meditations, as to fail being attracted occasionally towards that well replenished little case-bottle," ignores the spiritual fact, and in his emptiness turns to alcohol. In contrast, Ishmael seeks a synthesis of materialism and idealism, science and religion, to avoid the futile polarity of "Locke's head" and "Kant's," to arrive finally at an equilibrium of doubt and intuition.

For Ishmael, like Emerson, Locke's theory of ideas represents the "Fall of man," since it introduces skepticism about the ultimate intelligibility of the universe. In "The Whiteness of the Whale," he directly challenges the theory of ideas to show that not all ideas are caused by experience, that, specifically, there is an uncaused, intuitive knowledge of evil, which demonstrates the intelligibility of the universe.

IV

The meaning of Moby-Dick, Ishmael declares, rides on this "thing of whiteness" (188). Ishmael seeks to show that whiteness is a mystic sign whose essence we intuit. The problem is that whiteness carries contradictory associations among the world's cultures. It is both "made the emblem of many touching, noble things" (189) and of many horrible

things, and this diversity suggests that there is neither an essential whiteness nor an innate idea of whiteness, only a whiteness built up by habit and by the association of ideas, as an empiricist would say.

If Ishmael here alludes to the "relativity of symbolic meaning" (McSweeney 39), he nevertheless insists that "there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue" that horrifies us (189)--a determinate meaning, or essence. To determine what it is, he undertakes

the citation of some of those instances wherein this thing of whiteness--though for the time either wholly or in great part stripped of all direct associations calculated to impart to it aught fearful, but, nevertheless, is found to exert over us the same sorcery. (192)

His citation of whiteness "stripped of all direct associations" directly contradicts the principle of sensationalism, that all ideas are caused by sense perception. His citation, however, fails, he says, to penetrate to "the hidden cause" of whiteness (192), fails to reveal the essence of whiteness. At this point, his argument in danger of collapsing, Ishmael dramatically invokes a fact of nature, a "strong young colt, foaled in some peaceful valley of Vermont, far removed from all beasts of prey":

If you but shake a fresh buffalo robe behind him, so that he cannot even see

it, but only smells its wild animal muskiness--why will he start, snort, and with bursting eyes paw the ground in phrensies of affright? There is no remembrance in him of any gorings of wild creatures in his green northern home, so that the strange muskiness he smells cannot recall to him anything associated with the experience of former perils; for what knows he, this New England colt, of the black bisons of distant Oregon? (194)

From this natural phenomenon, Ishmael derives the intrinsic spiritual fact. If the colt has, independent of associations, an intuitive fear of bison, then it must be because of "the instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world." Ishmael then declares that whiteness is to him as "the shaking of that buffalo robe to the frightened colt!" (194): whiteness also corresponds to an instinctual knowledge of evil. Thus Ishmael appears to refute the theory of ideas on two counts: he demonstrates the existence of innate ideas and simultaneously asserts the objectivity of evil. If we have "an instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world," then no longer is evil merely, as Emerson says in "Experience," a "shadow that we cast" (269).

Now, rather than the object of cultural associations, whiteness is a "mystic sign," and, like the colt, for Ishmael, "though neither knows where lie the nameless things of which the mystic sign gives forth such hints; yet with me, as with the colt, somewhere those things must exist" (194-5). An essence corresponding to an intuitive idea, whiteness

demonstrates the necessity of "things that must exist," thus the ultimate intelligibility of the universe as a manifestation of divine intelligence. If sensationalism would affirm that the meaning of whiteness arises from cultural associations, that in itself whiteness is a blankness, Ishmael argues that whiteness is a symbol, which connects the manifold interpretations of whiteness to something that, although unseen, "must exist."

V

In "The Doubloon" the coin nailed to the mainmast by Ahab also calls forth a great diversity of interpretations from Ahab and the crew. From the negativity of diversity, Ishmael again affirms the necessary intelligibility of the universe, exclaiming that "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher, except to sell by the cartload" (430). It might seem, given this diversity, that the significance of the coin is more imposed by individuals than lurking in it. For Ishmael, however, there is an instinct of interpretation excited by the "mystic sign" which then unites the various interpretations in itself and connects them to a truth that "must exist."

However, one detects in "The Doubloon" a different though paradoxically parallel theory of the symbol, which begins to suggest the limitations of Ishmael's Emersonianism. In the

first place, Ahab has set "apart and sanctified to one awe-striking end" the gold doubloon not to demonstrate truths that "must exist," but to forge the unity of the crew. For Ahab, the "mystic sign" which admits diverse interpretations does not fold them into a necessary truth, as for Ishmael, but effects political unity. Second, the coin, itself an "empty cipher" with no intrinsic value or significance, is strangely pressed into service by a theory seeking to demonstrate the intrinsic value and significance of the universe. Finally, Ishmael's naive celebration of interpretation is directly contradicted by Pip, the black cabin boy, who was abandoned at sea because "a whale would sell for thirty times what" he would (413). If Ishmael's theory of the symbol is meant to avert the mechanical reduction represented by exchange value, Pip, who can have no illusions about the fundamental role of exchange value in modernity, seems to mock Ishmael's idealist faith that "the world" is not in fact "an empty cipher . . . to sell by the cartload"; indeed, by conjugating the verb "to look," he implies that interpretation is merely a mechanical act, not the intuitive one Ishmael describes. All of this points to a less sanguine view of the symbol than Ishmael's.

The fragmentary United States furnished Melville with many examples of such a theory of the symbol, parallel to the idealist one, but avowedly intent on turning to politics the powers of the symbol to overcome the fragmentation and diversity of interests. Charles Gradison Finney, leader of

the Second Great Awakening, argued that the nature of the United States compelled such a manipulative theory of the symbol. Alarmed by the French Revolution and the Whisky Rebellion, a professional elite promoted the Second Great Awakening to foster among "disparate peoples and competing churches" a new form of "social cohesion" (P. Miller, Life 29).⁴ They sought to avoid the sectarian divisions that plagued rationalist religion by devising the highly theatrical symbols much like those of Father Mapple and Ahab.⁵ These symbols would, like the doubloon, allow for divergent interpretations and then fold them into a kind of unity; if each group or faction invests the symbol with different meanings, the symbol itself binds them together, and forms a coalition. Such coalitions of groups divided by race, ethnicity, region, class, sex and religion are the hallmark of American politics and they depend upon symbols which allow for diversity of interpretation.

What is striking in Finney's Lectures on Revivals, a "handbook. . . for promoting revivals" (xi), is the convergence of spiritual and mechanistic rhetoric, the first derived from the organicism of the counter-enlightenment, the second from the mechanical principle of the Enlightenment. This configuration of ideas, represented in Moby-Dick by Ahab, is particularly indicative of antebellum thinking, and of the divergence of idealism to mass politics, given the utility of the romantic symbol for building coalitions. Finney believed

that "revivals . . . were simply the result of cause and effect" (x); religion was a technique for producing "religious excitements." To "expect to promote religion without excitements," he wrote, "is unphilosophical and absurd" (11). Finney called for professional preachers, without settled congregations, roaming among diverse groups, fostering religious unity in place of the older unities of the Gemeinschaft. To take "advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them" (9), Finney recommended studying the techniques of politicians and actors. Politicians

get up meetings, circulate handbills and pamphlets, blaze away in the newspapers, send their ships about the streets on wheels with flags and sailors, send coaches all over town, with handbills, to bring people up to the polls, all to gain attention to their cause and elect their candidate. All these are their "measures," and for their end they are wisely calculated. (181)

Finney hardly distinguished this highly-theatrical mass politics from the theater itself: "The more theatrical a sermon is, the better." Since the "common-sense people will be entertained with that manner of speaking," the preacher should compete with the theater by telling stories and making "the full impression which the truth is calculated to make" (211). Finally, Finney put the mechanical effect of repetition at the heart of the revival: "Preaching should be

repetitious. If a minister wishes to preach with effect, he must not be afraid of repeating" his message (210). Ironically, Finney eventually renounced the revival, saying that "efforts to promote revivals of religion have become so mechanical, there is so much policy and machinery, so much dependence upon means and measures, so much of man and so little of God" (xxiv).

In Finney's Lectures, Emerson's technique of interpreting every diverse particular as a fragment of a greater whole is applied to the crucial political problem of the Gesellschaft: to derive unity from a great diversity of interests no longer bound together by tradition or Gemeinschaft-relations. This, too, is exactly the problem that Ahab confronts, to form the "isolatoes" of his crew into an "indissoluble league"; his solution--to give them the whale as their "final and romantic object" (212)--resembles Finney's. That Ahab succeeds in seducing Ishmael to his cause betokens the diversion of idealism to mass politics envisioned by Finney.

VI

Throughout Moby-Dick Ishmael, the Emersonian philosopher, is shadowed by the crowd, representative of the masses, and more generally, by mass culture, which falsifies his idealist presuppositions. Both the crowd and mass culture entail Le Bon's "law of mental unity," in which the symbol elicits unity among individuals devoid of common bonds. The first chapters

of the book repeatedly juxtapose Ishmael's idealism with the imagery of crowds, alcoholism, the theater, the daily press and revivalism, all mass phenomena. At some points, Ishmael invests these things with spiritual import; at other points he frankly admits that they have conspired to delude him.

In "Loomings," the first chapter, Ishmael says that, in retrospect, the entire voyage had been delusional. He had set out like Emerson to reconcile himself to the negations of mass society, to be "social" with the "horror," to discern in evil "good in the making." Of all this he had made the whale the symbol, for it transcends the negativity of dualism and portends the unification and synthesis of all contrasting terms: "two and two there floated into my innermost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, midmost of them all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air" (7). Ishmael's concept of being is, as Emerson writes in "Compensation," "not a relation or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts and times within itself" (42). Moby Dick symbolizes to Ishmael the "vast affirmative"; his voyage is a speculative, Emersonian one, to derive the "vast affirmative" from the social and metaphysical negations of modernity.

But a moment earlier he has joked that his

going on this whaling voyage, formed part
of the grand programme of Providence that

was drawn up a long time ago. It came as a sort of brief interlude and solo between more extensive performances. I take it that part of the bill must have run something like this:

"Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States.

"Whaling Voyage by One Ishmael.

"Bloody Battle in Afghanistan."

Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies, and short and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces--though I cannot tell why this was exactly; yet, now that I recall all the circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment. (7)

This rhetoric clearly alludes to the theater and the press, to make the point that mass culture has deluded him; his performance owes not to such idealities as "freewill" and "judgement," not to the "vast affirmative," but to disguised "springs and motives," including Ahab's, closely associated with mass culture and politics.

In "Loomings," Ishmael, pursuing his melancholic musings upon the sea, is surrounded with "crowds of water-gazers. . . . Thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries." Using a term from mesmerism, an extremely popular

pseudo-science, Ishmael jokes that the sea draws the lonely individuals of mass society as if "magnetically"; at the water's edge, "they all unite" (4). Thus the first pages of Moby-Dick juxtapose Ishmael, the speculative idealist, with the crowd, and suggest that the latter is operated on by forces analogous to magnetism, and imply that the power of such forces over the masses arises from the loss of the Gemeinschaft and the absence in the Gesellschaft of a priori unity.

Then, in the Spouter-Inn, Melville juxtaposes Ishmael's epiphany about the "oil-painting so thoroughly besmoked, and every way defaced, that . . . it was only by diligent study and a series of systematic visits to it . . . that you could in any way arrive at an understanding" with alcoholism, to suggest that both speak to the loss of meaning and community in modernity. The painting is a symbol: its "indefinite, half-attained, unimaginable sublimity . . . fairly froze you to it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what that marvellous painting meant" (12-13). Precisely because the painting, or symbol, signifies no precise thing, it seems more generally meaningful, and excites the instinct for interpretation, the search for universal intelligibility. Ishmael struggles to interpret the painting and decides at last that it symbolizes the great leviathan impaling itself on a mast-head--being itself becoming intelligible in the act of interpretation.

But Melville suggests that such epiphanies are irrelevant and misleading; first, he points to the tribal past--the collection of "a heathenish array of monstrous clubs and spears" (13), the "savage" implements of the hunting pack--as if to place the symbol in the context of the "dissolution of the tribe" and the unleashing of what Mannheim calls "impulsive energies . . . seeking integration about a new object" (64). Then he points to the alcoholic present, which seems to substitute for the tribal past the unity and solidarity of the drunken crowd. That one passes to "a dark-looking den--the bar" through the "vast arched bone of the whale's jaw" (14), marks the diversion of instinctual desire or natural appetite--represented by the "savage" implements--to the secondary, manufactured, symbolic object, in this case, alcohol. But if the riot of the sailors provides a measure of solidarity, ultimately, the intensity of the appearance of solidarity is in relation to the waste of the original sociality, of life itself. Mass culture, in the form of alcoholism, transforms this into an economic logic:

Within are shabby shelves, ranged round with old decanters, bottles, flasks; and in those jaws of swift destruction, like another cursed Jonah (by which name indeed they called him), bustles a little withered old man, who, for their money, dearly sells the sailors deliriums and death.

Abominable are the tumblers into which he pours his poison. Though true cylinders without--within, the villainous green goggling glasses deceitfully

tapered downwards into the glass,
 surround these footpads' goblets. Fill
 to this mark, and your charge is but a
 penny; to this a penny more; and so on to
 the full glass--the Cape Horn measure,
 which you may gulph down for a shilling.
 (14)

Ishmael's symbolic interpretation of the sublime painting seems to "bleed" into mass culture, to be ambiguously related to the alcoholic "savagery" of the crowd, a simulation of tribal solidarity, a prototype of mass culture.

In the chapters leading up to the departure of the Pequod, Melville time and again shows Ishmael invest ideal meaning in figures associated with mass culture. Father Mapple, apparently a follower of Finney, who believes the more theatrical a sermon, the better, has an architect finish "the pulpit without a stairs, substituting a perpendicular side ladder, like those used in mounting a ship from a boat at sea" (39). Admitting a certain doubt, Ishmael "pondered some time without fully comprehending the reason for this. Father Mapple enjoyed such a wide reputation for sincerity and sanctity, that I could not suspect him off courting notoriety by any mere tricks of the stage." He draws back from the perception that Mapple deliberately makes the sermon theatrical with "mere tricks of the stage." Instead, he affirms a spiritual fact:

It must symbolize something unseen. Can it
 be, then, that by that act of physical

isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connexions? . . . What could be more full of meaning? (39-40)

If Emerson sought the "vast affirmative, excluding negation," Melville portrays Ishmael's Emersonianism as a kind of sentimentalism, as if Ishmael were not transcending, but oscillating between two poles of mass culture, sentimentalism and sensationalism, as he does between Bildad and Peleg, the owners of the Pequod, who run a good cop/bad cop routine on Ishmael. To cheat him of his wages, they stage a terrible row; Peleg seems to defend Ishmael's interests; Bildad insists on the lower wage; in the end, Ishmael, alarmed by Bildad's parsimony, agrees to Peleg's compromise, forfeiting his fair share of the proceeds. Melville indicates the habitual, that is, rehearsed, quality of the spectacle, staged, he suggests, like mass culture in general, to limit the range of options to a controlled dualism. For setting the scene, casting the crew, launching the drama, the owners of the Pequod clearly allude to the ruling duality of mass culture, the religious Bildad representative of sentimentalism, the alcoholic, cursing Peleg of sensationalism. Ishmael oscillates between Bildad's spiritual guidance and Peleg's sensationalist eruptions, as he will between Emerson's philosophy and Ahab's sensationalism (Peleg first acquaints Ishmael with Ahab). Overseeing final preparations for the Pequod's departure, Bildad sings "a dismal stave of psalmody" to the men;

meanwhile, Peleg "ripped and swore . . . in the most frightful manner." Growing alarmed at the thought of "such a devil [as Peleg] for a pilot," Ishmael takes comfort in the thought "that in pious Bildad might be found some salvation." Musing, Ishmael receives from Peleg, who "must have been drinking," a "sudden sharp poke" in his rear (103). At that moment, he says of Bildad's psalms: "Never did those sweet words sound more sweetly to me than then. They were full of hope and fruition" (104). Hardly to be taken seriously, Ishmael's sentimentality indicates the delusive quality of the voyage, given the tendency of mass culture to take over the powers of the symbol.

Notes

1. For a contemporary account, see Alexander H. Everett, "History of Intellectual Philosophy," in The Transcendentalists, edited by Perry Miller. In 1829, as John Quincy Adams's minister to Spain reporting in the North American Review on the progress of idealism in Europe, Everett ascribed it both to the French revolution and to Hume and his "followers." He writes that as a consequence of the "long rain of disasters which accompanied" the French Revolution, there arose a "strong prejudice against the moral and political theories which prevailed about the time of its opening." These theories asserted

that all our ideas are either received through the senses or obtained by reflection upon such as are so received. . . . In order to contest this principle with success, it was necessary to show, that such of our notions as are not the immediate results of sensation are original possessions of the mind. (30)

To refute the principle of the tabula rasa, idealists sought a priori or "innate" ideas that did not arise from experience, but which made experience possible. Idealists assumed these practical laws or "natural faculties" to be "God-given," as David Norton writes in David Hume: Common-Sense Moralism, Skeptical Metaphysician, thus "part of the overall design of a Providential Nature," utterly trustworthy because "what we naturally believe is . . . supernaturally guaranteed" (202-3). Idealism, says Everett, aspires to

a nobler and a loftier destiny than that which we can here aspire to, by bringing our minds into nearer contact,--identifying them, indeed, by some mysterious and inexplicable bond of union,--with the sublime spirit whose energy pervades and governs the Universe. (32)

Everett portrays this return to the metaphysics of innate ideas as a reaction both to the French Revolution and to the

materialism and sensuality,--of sophists and skeptics,--of Epicurus, Pyrrho, Condillac, Helvetius, and Hume. It is now affirmed, that because the mind can only communicate with external objects, through the senses, it is in fact nothing more than a faculty attached to the body; and the system is pushed into its consequences until it ends in the denial of the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God. Alarmed for these sacred and cherished principles, which, as we have

already remarked, man will make any sacrifice rather than relinquish, and casting about with anxious impatience for the means of securing them, the mind, in the first moments of uncertainty, rejects en masse the whole improved doctrine which has apparently involved such fatal results, and oscillates back to the visions of its childhood, content to embrace the ideal theory, with all its absurdity, rather than abandon the glorious truths which it is for the time supposed to be connected. Such appears to have been the origin of the second Platonism of antiquity, and of the revival of idealism in modern Europe. (33)

2. On Emerson and skepticism see John Michael, Emerson and Skepticism: The Cipher of the World, Stanley Cavell, In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism, and Michael Fischer, Stanley Cavell and Literary Skepticism.

3. One can easily see these tablets as "paradigms of textuality" as Peter J. Bellis does in No Mysteries Out of Ourselves: Identity and Textual Form in the Novels of Herman Melville:

Nothing lies behind these tablets; they are inscribed surfaces that cover no depths, hide no remains. Their inscriptions refer to men who are doubly absent, both dead and placeless. The location of the tablets in New Bedford is completely arbitrary. They may be, in this sense, paradigms of textuality--like Redburn's guidebook, with its descriptions of places that no longer exist, they bear the traces of absent referents, inscriptions that at once promise and deny the possibility of resurrection and return. Interpreting these surfaces yields only a sense of loss. (106)

One might also say that the passage renders in the psychodynamics of literacy the bitter loss of community, the spiritual isolation of the individual in the Gesellschaft: in the chapel, mourning, like reading, is neither expressive nor collective, but private and silent; the engraved tablets reflect the impersonality traditionally ascribed to writing, as opposed to speech, ascribed now to the Gesellschaft as a whole; the connection between the "frigid inscriptions" and the absent, "placelessly perished" sailors poses the inherent danger of writing (36)--that the representation might outlast, even preempt the referent--a danger incarnate in a literate society mediated by mass communications.

4. Perry Miller writes in The Life of the Mind In America that "there survives out of the years 1790 to 1815 an immense . . . American literature of denunciation of the French Revolution, with proportionately almost nothing on its behalf" (46). Miller shows that this fear contributed to the great antebellum outpouring of idealism. The Revival, the "empire of benevolence," and the "legal sublime," all appropriated the idealist principles of radical reform to shore up the status quo.

5. In Moby-Dick and Calvinism: A World Dismantled, T. Walter Herbert, Jr. writes that Melville's "earliest religious sentiments would . . . have been shaped by the . . . Reverend Jacob Brodhead. . . [who] participated in the revivals of the Awakening [and] was famous for a style of preaching that brought on the dramas of regeneration" (33-5).

Chapter Three:

Hume's Skepticism, Ahab's Metaphysics

I

Ishmael and Ahab correspond to a distinction Emerson makes in "Experience": "Life wears to me a visionary face. Hardest roughest action is visionary also. It is but a choice between soft and turbulent dreams" (273). Ishmael, a visionary, transforms every skeptical negation into a platform for spiritual expansion. Ahab, in his soliloquy on the making of Queequeg's coffin into a life-buoy, explicitly rejects Ishmael's philosophy:

Here now's the very dreaded symbol of grim death, by a mere hap, made the expressive sign of the help and hope of most endangered life. A life-buoy of a coffin! Does it go further? Can it be that in some spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immorality-preserver! I'll think of that. But no. So far gone am I in the dark side of earth, that its other side, the theoretic bright one, seems but uncertain twilight to me. (528)

But if Ahab, on the "dark side of earth," dismisses Ishmael's dialectics, he, like Ishmael, also abhors the mechanical reduction--the disenchantment of the world--and seeks to restore the intelligibility of the universe as intelligence. Indeed, his "fiery hunt" for Moby Dick alludes to what the Enlightenment considered the primal origin of metaphysics--the urge to personify the world, to invest it with intelligence,

not dialectically like Ishmael, but by ascribing malice to and killing the whale. In "The Grand Armada," Melville offers a vivid allegory for Ishmael's and Ahab's sharply divergent reactions to mass society.

In "The Grand Armada," the whalers happen upon a massive "aggregation of the Sperm Whale." If in the past Sperm Whales "almost invariably sailing in small detached companies," now the destructive efficiency of modern whaling effects a kind of "dissolution of the tribe," as the older tribe-like groupings are replaced by

extensive heads, sometimes embracing so great a multitude, that it would almost seem as if numerous nations of them had sworn solemn league and covenant for mutual assistance and protection. (382)

Thus amassed, the whales, when approached by the whalers, fall into the "distraction of panic" that, says Ishmael, universally effects "herding creatures," including human beings "herded together in the sheepfold of a theatre's pit," who will,

at the slightest alarm of fire, rush helter-skelter for the outlets, crowding, trampling, jamming, and remorselessly dashing each other to death. Best, therefore, withhold any amazement at the strangely gallied whales before us, for there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men. (384-5)

Amid the crowd-like outburst of the besieged whales, the "tapering force" of an escaped whale propels Ishmael's small boat

into the innermost heart of the shoal, as if from some mountain torrent we had slid into a serene valley lake. Here the storms in the roaring glens between the outermost whales, were heard but not felt. . . . We were now in that enchanted calm which they say lurks at the heart of every commotion. (386-7)

In this romantically "enchanted calm" that, in "Experience," Emerson calls the "middle region of our being," the "temperate zone," the "equator of life, of thought, of spirit, of poetry,--a narrow belt" (263), Ishmael discovers, amid the commotion of crowd, precisely as Emerson urges, his spiritual center; in this transcendental moment, he reconciles himself to the horrors of his society: "[A]mid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy" (389).¹

Melville, however, immediately pits against Ishmael's spiritual consolidation another whale "wounded . . . but not effectually." By an "unimaginable accident," the wounded whale runs away with the harpoon lashed to him; "tormented to madness, he was now churning through the water, violently flailing with his flexible tail, and tossing the keen spade

about him, wounding and murdering his own comrades" (389). The violence of the whale refers the reader to the wounded Ahab's "fiery hunt" which also will bring death to his comrades.

Unlike Ishmael's soft dreams, Ahab's turbulent ones draw him into mass society; for him to realize his metaphysical intent is paradoxically to alienate his metaphysics in the effort to dominate his crew. There is, then, a division in him between his "live leg" and his "dead limb," metaphysics and politics: in him, says Ishmael, "two different things were warring. While his one live leg made lively echoes along the deck, every stroke of his dead limb sounded like a coffin-tap. On life and death this old man walked" (233).²

Ahab's "dead limb" makes the same "accursed sound" (529) as the carpenter's hammering of the coffin. We are reminded of the Typee's "beating" of the tattoo and the drum beat to quarters in Billy Budd, two forms of repetition that in the absence of intuitive truths produce the effect or illusion of such truths. As Ahab aptly remarks, "What in all things makes the sounding-board is this--there's naught beneath" (528). Indicating "nought beneath," the sound Ahab's bone leg makes is of repetition itself, the very principle of the mechanical reduction. Again, Ahab is divided between his metaphysics, which pit him against the Enlightenment, and repetition, the Enlightenment's "principle of immanence," the mechanical sound

of his dead leg (Horkheimer and Adorno 12).

Motivating Ahab's metaphysical quest, Ahab's crisis of belief, his perception of the universe as a mechanism devoid of intelligence, derives from the philosophical narrative that traced Hume's skepticism to its origins in Locke's theory of ideas. In its purest form, his case for the intelligibility of the universe rests on a metaphysical theory of cause and effect, inasmuch as Ahab insists that what might seem a random collision of atoms--Ahab and Moby Dick--is in fact an act of intelligence, the intelligent malice of the whale. Thus Ahab affirms a necessary connection between cause and effect, which, he believes, demonstrates that nature is in fact universal intelligence. Hume, in contrast, argued that such a theory of causality is a fiction of the mind imposed on nature, and subverted the case for nature as intelligence. Thus, although Hume is mentioned nowhere in Moby-Dick, "The Whiteness of the Whale" is inconceivable apart from Hume's skepticism, especially his critique of causality.

II

Hume's skepticism was greatly feared following the French Revolution. In an essay written at Harvard about the "terror attached to the name Hume" (qtd. in Michael 42), Emerson charged that philosopher with seeking

to undermine the foundations of belief,
and to represent the eternal truths of

morality as involved in the same gloomy uncertainty with which he would envelop all knowledge. Entrenching himself behind his system, which can find no relation between cause and effect, he wanders on till he has effected memory, judgement, and, finally, our own consciousness; and the laws of morals become idle dreams and fantasies. (qtd. in Michael 40-1).

Even today, a good case can be made for Hume as among the most radical philosophers, as Gilles Deleuze does in Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature.³ More recently Terry Eagleton has vividly depicted the social and intellectual crisis ensuing from Hume's skepticism:

Theory and practice, far from being mutually supportive are entirely at odds, so that for Hume only some form of Nietzschean amnesia would seem to hold society together. It is a sobering thought, however, that society survives only by dint of intellectual suicide. . . . Customary practice no longer mediates absolute norms, but actually substitutes itself for them. Practices must provide their own rationales, and theory, far from securing them, now actively disables them. If intuition persuades you that there is truth, theory informs you that there is just intuition. In an ironic reversal, society itself, which works by custom and blind sentiment . . . assumes that there is somewhere some solid ground for its conduct, which philosophy can supply; philosophy, supposed to demonstrate such grounds, brutally whittles them away to custom and sentiment. Paradoxically, the philosopher is an anti-social monstrosity precisely because he reduces ideas to social practices. . . . Society itself, by contrast, is remorselessly

metaphysical, gullibly convinced that its
 opinions have some unimpeachable basis.
 (48)

After Hume, the very foundations of society appear to be "remorselessly metaphysical," a perception that corresponds to the contemporary concept of ideology, suggesting that consciousness, blind to its own arbitrary underpinnings, is fundamentally delusional, a suggestion resisted by Emerson, Ishmael, and Ahab.

Emerson explains the "terror that attaches to the name Hume" by the fact that Hume finds "no relation between cause and effect," which dooms morality, knowledge, memory, judgement and consciousness. Since Newton, the theory of causality had occupied the place in philosophy subsequently occupied by linguistics: all epistemological issues seemed to depend on it.⁴ Ultimately, Moby-Dick concerns the relation of a cause, the whale, to its effect, on Ahab.

Max Weber ascribed the disenchanting effects of the Enlightenment to "rational, empirical knowledge," which, transforming the world "into a causal mechanism," calls into question the "ethical postulate that the world is a God-ordained, and hence somehow meaningfully and ethically oriented, cosmos" (350-351). In fact, for rationalists, the world was divinely ordered and ethically meaningful because it was a "causal mechanism."⁵ The argument from design, favored by rationalists, stipulates that the creator "thinks" in

causal laws; thus we can infer his mind from the laws of the creation. In effect, this formula reconciles science and religion: science shows God thinking. In contrast, Hume's critique of causality impeded the efforts of the rationalists to identify the laws of cause and effect as God's laws in order to reconcile science and religion.

Hume undertook an immanent critique of Locke's representative theory of perception. Locke argued that we do not directly perceive objects, that we perceive representations of objects, ideas caused in our mind. Following Galileo, Locke distinguished between primary and secondary qualities, the former a quality of the object, the latter a quality of perception. Color, for example, an effect of reflected light, is, as Ishmael says, "not actually in substances." The distinction between primary and secondary qualities logically gives rise to the possibility of skepticism; as Father Copleston writes, "On Locke's representative theory of perception he has no means of establishing the validity of his distinction between primary and secondary qualities." For "if we know only ideas immediately, we are in no position to compare ideas with things and ascertain whether the former resemble the latter or not, or even to establish whether there are any things other than ideas" (99). Ideas, perhaps, as Emerson said, have a "creative power" of their own to form the world they seem to reflect.

To mitigate the skeptical effects of his theory of ideas, Locke relied on, among other things, a concept of the self-evident necessity of cause and effect, which supplies the unity of the universe and makes knowledge possible. Without the necessary truth of cause and effect, one could not be certain that ideas are caused by objects; in fact, there would be no way even to verify the existence of objects.

Hume assumes with Locke that objects cause ideas. But then he asks what object causes the idea of causality? Arguing that the essential attribute of causality is the idea of power or necessary connection, Hume seeks the source of this idea in either deductive or inductive reason, for, he argues in the Treatise, "as we have no idea, that is not deriv'd from an impression, we must find some impression, that gives rise to this idea of necessity, if we assert we have really such an idea" (205; bk. 1, pt. 3, sec. 14). Since the idea of power or necessary connection is not like two plus two equals four, a necessary truth, it cannot be given in deductive reason. Thus Hume seeks its origin in experience. But when

we look about us toward external objects, and consider the operation of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connexion; any quality, which binds the effect to the cause, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other. We only find that, the one does actually, in fact, follow the other. The impulse of one billiard-ball is attended with

motion in the second. This is the whole that appears to the outward senses. The mind feels no sentiment or inward impression from this succession of objects: Consequently, there is not, in any single, particular instance of cause and effect, any thing which can suggest the idea of power or necessary connexion. (Enquiry 63; sec. 7, pt. 1)

It appears that the idea of necessary connection is itself not caused by any object. How, then, does it arise?

Hume shows that repetition of a particular causes the mind to apply a universal quality upon a particular. The repetitive association of two ideas, Hume argues, causes the mind to pass easily from one idea to the other:

Tho' the several resembling instances, which give rise to the idea of power, have no influence of each other, and can never produce any quality in the object, which can be the model of that idea, yet the observation of this resemblance produces a new impression in the mind, which is its real model. For after we have observ'd the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that relation. . . . The several instances of resembling conjunctions lead us into the notion of power and necessity. . . . Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another. (Treatise 215; bk. 1, pt. 3, sec. 14)

The mind experiences this ease of passage between two ideas as a necessary connection between cause and effect, which it then attributes to the objects themselves. The idea of necessary connection has no basis in the objective world but arises from a relation of ideas in the mind itself: "Objects have no discoverable connexion together"; it is only because of "custom operating upon the imagination, that we can draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of another." (Treatise 153; bk. 1, pt. 3, sec. 8). The effect of the world on the mind is for Hume akin to a lie:

As liars, by the frequent repetition of their lies, come at last to remember them; so the judgement, or rather the imagination, by the like means, may have ideas so strongly imprinted on it, and conceive them in so full a light, that they may operate upon the mind in the same manner with those, which the senses, memory or reason present to us. But as education is an artificial and not a natural cause, and as its maxims are frequently contrary to reason, and even to themselves in different times and places, it is never upon that account recogniz'd by philosophers; tho' in reality it be built almost on the same foundation of custom and repetition as our reasonings from causes and effects. (Treatise 166-7; bk. 1, pt. 3, sec. 9)

In this manner, Hume undercut the rationalist philosophers who sought a foundation for philosophy in causality.⁶ When it turns out that the idea of causality is not caused by any object, philosophy, having staked its

epistemology on causality, yields skepticism. When it turns out that the idea of causality arises from the mind itself, then "custom" and "habit" seem inevitably to generate metaphysical illusions which are then projected onto the world in the form of "objective" qualities. Hume's skepticism divides the universe into a delusional consciousness that falsely ascribes its ideas to objects, and an unknowable world-in-itself, represented to Ahab by the whiteness of the whale.

III

Ishmael has already admitted that the many contradictory meanings given whiteness by the world's cultures suggests that there is no essence or inner idea of whiteness. Nevertheless, he argues that whiteness is a "mystic sign" of the demonism of the world, of which Ishmael claims innate knowledge. Finally, however, he admits that he has not reached the essence of whiteness:

But not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange and far more portentous--why, as we have seen, it is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christians Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind.
(195)

At this point, the focus of his speculations shifts from his philosophy to Ahab's, and from Locke's critique of innate ideas to the color theory that had traditionally been associated with the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Following Newton's Opticks, color was clearly a secondary quality, not actually in the object but an effect of reflected light.' It was a clear example of an idea caused by an object which nevertheless does not faithfully reflect the object. Thus the optics of color came to describe the idea that the world always, as Emerson says in "Experience," "wears our color" (271) and, conversely, that in itself, the world is a whiteness, or as Ishmael says, a "dumb blankness" which "by its indefiniteness . . . shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation" (195). If all thinking, as Hume proved, attributes its ideas, like color, to the world, then whiteness represents the world in its primary qualities, in its utter indifference to human meaning, a machine, devoid of unifying intelligence.

Ishmael, struggling to represent Ahab's motivations, associates the paradoxes of whiteness with atheism, the withdrawal of intelligence from the universe: "[I]s it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows--a colorless, all color of atheism from which we shrink?" This withdrawal produces the dualistic, mechanical universe represented by whiteness,

itself dual, "a colorless, all color"--in appearance "the visible absence of color," in reality, as Newton showed with a prism, "the concrete of all colors." Thus whiteness points to the delusional consciousness that arises from the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, which Ishmael calls

that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues . . . are but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within. . . . (195)

His despairing conclusion--that the "mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge. . . ."--reproduces the distinction between the world in its blankness and a delusional consciousness, the medium which endows objects with color. It is to this vision that Ishmael finally refers Ahab's quest: "Of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?" (195).

Repelled by a vision of the world as a "dumb blankness" that stabs us with thoughts of annihilation, Ahab's metaphysical quest asserts a necessary connection--between himself and the whale. Whereas Hume argued that one could not

infer the object from the idea it causes, since the very principle of causality is unverifiable, Ahab insists that he can in fact infer the intelligent malice of the whale from its effect on Ahab. Ahab defends the principle of causality itself, to restore the correspondence of the idea and the object, to demonstrate the intelligibility of the universe as intelligence, not machine.

IV

The model for this metaphysical concept of causality as necessary connection is anthropomorphism--to attribute intelligence to natural causes. In this sense, the "fiery hunt," which holds Moby Dick responsible for what would seem to be an accidental collision of "atoms," returns to the original religious impulse that Hume describes in The Natural History of Religion:

We are placed in this world, as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event are entirely concealed from us. . . . [L]ife and death, health and sickness, plenty and want . . . are distributed amongst the human species by secret and unknown causes, whose operation is oft unexpected, and always unaccountable.
(140)

The idea that Moby Dick is an intelligent agent arises on this basis. As Hume writes, these "unknown causes" become the "constant object of our hope and fear"; the "imagination"

inevitably forms "ideas of those powers, on which we have so entire a dependence" (77).

Melville carefully places Ahab's metaphysics of the whale in the context of the religious awe Moby Dick attracts among whalers. Following early reports of a "Sperm Whale of uncommon magnitude and malignity," repetition, as in Hume's analysis of causality, produces the effect of universality: "repeated disastrous repulses"--a form of repetition--"all accumulating and piling their terrors upon Moby Dick" give rise to "wild rumors" that "did in the end incorporate with themselves all manner of morbid hints, and half-formed fetal suggestions of supernatural agencies, which eventually invested Moby Dick with new terrors unborrowed from anything that visibly appears" (180-1). Finally, then, such "seemed the White Whale's infernal aforethought of ferocity, that every dismembering or death that he causes, was not wholly regarded as having been inflicted by an unintelligent agent" (183-4). Hume calls this the

universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. . . . [B]y a natural propensity, [we] ascribe malice or good-will to every thing, that hurts or pleases us. Hence the frequency and beauty of the prosopopeia in poetry; where trees, mountains and streams are personified, and the inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment and passion. (141)

According to Hume, all metaphysics have their origin in prosopopeia, the urge to personify nature, to invest it with sentiment and passion and intelligence, which arises as an "instinctive" reaction to the indifference of the mechanistic universe. This holds for Ahab when he ascribes malice to the whale that takes his leg:

In his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them. . . . That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning . . . deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. . . . All truth with malice in it . . . all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. (184)

Ahab transfers his rage at unaccountable causes to the whale, who now comes to "visibly personify," to incarnate, "malicious agencies," "all truth with malice," the "subtle demonisms of life and thought," "all evil." Personifying the indifference of nature in the whale, Ahab makes what otherwise would not be accountable, accountable, what would not be assailable, "practically assailable."

Thus Ahab corresponds to one among Hume's "gradation of three opinions," the vulgar, the false and the true, each

distinguished by a concept of causality (Treatise 272; bk. 1, pt. 4, sec, 3). The "vulgar" falsely perceive

a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together; and because custom has render'd it difficult to separate the ideas, they are apt to fancy such a separation to be in itself impossible and absurd. (272)

The vulgar ascribe the effects of ideas to the world, even after the Enlightenment popularized the theory of ideas. In contrast, the exponents of the Enlightenment represent what Hume calls the "false philosophy." These philosophers "immediately perceive the false hood of these vulgar sentiments, and discover that there is no known connexion among objects." They realize "that 'tis not from a view of the nature and qualities of objects we infer one from another, but only when in several instances we observe them to have been constantly conjoin'd." These "false" philosophers have

sufficient force of genius to free them from the vulgar error, that there is a natural and perceivable connexion betwixt the several sensible qualities and actions of matter. (272)

But the "false" philosopher, unlike the "true," has not sufficient genius "to keep them from ever seeking for this connexion in matter or causes," as Ahab does when he seeks intelligence in Moby Dick. And, Hume adds, "what can be

imagin'd more tormenting, than to seek with eagerness, what for ever flies us; and seek for it in a place, where 'tis impossible it can ever exist?" (272-3).

V

Thus in "The Quarter-Deck," when Ahab confronts Starbuck with the "fiery hunt," he speaks as a "false" philosopher to a man of common sense. Since Starbuck lacks a theory of ideas, does not question the objects of his perception, and takes the world as it appears to be, Ahab draws his attention to "the little layer," the idea that "all visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks." Perhaps, says Ahab, "there's naught beyond"--no objects that cause ideas. Nevertheless, he argues that "in each event--in the living act, the undoubted deed--there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask." To reach the "still reasoning thing"--the innate intelligence of the universe, its unity--Ahab must "strike through the mask!" But "how can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall?" To strike through the wall of appearances, Ahab must personify skepticism in Moby Dick: "the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me." To attack the whale is to assert the reality of objects which by a real power cause ideas, thereby to reforge the unity of the universe. Ahab asserts a necessary connection or power binding him to the whale:

I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. (164)

VI

Ahab's revolt against the mechanical reduction takes a menacing turn, however, when the various forms of consciousness--Hume's "gradation of three opinions"--enter the political arena. In the wake of the mechanical reduction, as the force of skeptical philosophy impinges upon popular consciousness and unsettles the metaphysical verities of the Gemeinschaft, a special kind of "false philosopher" emerges, the religious fanatic or enthusiast, who, writes Hume "consecrates himself and bestows on his own person a scared character much superior to what forms and ceremonious institutions can confer on any other" ("Enthusiasm" 175):

The inspired person comes to regard himself as a distinguished favorite of the Divinity, and when this frenzy once takes place, which is the summit of enthusiasm . . . the fanatic madman delivers himself over blindly and without reserve to the supposed illapses of the spirit and to inspiration from above. (174)

Claiming intimacy with the deity, the enthusiast appears to restore intelligence to the universe. The danger of enthusiasm arises from its power over the dispossessed urban

masses, who, shaken by the loss of the Gemeinschaft, seek a community of spirit. Adam Smith perceived enthusiasm as a political threat to emerging capitalism. Fearing that sectarians might challenge private property, Smith recommended that the state stimulate "the frequency and gaiety of public diversions" so as to "dissipate that melancholy and gloomy humour which is almost always the nurse of popular superstition and enthusiasm" (qtd. in Farr 51). In effect, Smith recommends that the state sponsor mass culture to preempt its dangerous counterpart.

In Moby-Dick, Ishmael remarks that "the history of fanatics [is not] half so striking in respect to the measureless self-deception of the fanatic himself, as his measureless power of deceiving and bedeviling so many others" (315), a power demonstrated by the story of Gabriel. With "a deep, settled, fanatic delirium" in his eyes, Gabriel, like Father Mapple, employs various "tricks of the stage to gain "a wonderful ascendancy over almost everybody in the Jeroboam" (whose name, denoting a large wine bottle, suggests that religious enthusiasm works on the crew like alcohol). Gabriel, it turns out, learned his tricks

among the crazy society of Niskyeuna Shakers, where he had been a great prophet; in their cracked, secret meetings having several times descended from heaven by the way of a trap-door, announcing the speedy opening of the seventh vial, which he carried in his vest-pocket; but, which, instead of

containing gunpowder, was supposed to be charged by laudanum. (314)

Although Ahab expresses a deep personal distaste for Gabriel, there are many parallels: like Ahab, Gabriel plots his campaigns with the "cunning peculiar to craziness," and presents a "steady, common sense exterior" to obtain work as a sailor. Once at sea, he, like Ahab, reveals himself, declaring himself the "archangel Gabriel" and publishing his "manifesto, whereby he set himself forth as the deliverer of the isles of the sea and vicar-general of all Oceanica." With tricks of the stage Gabriel utterly bedevils the majority of the crew:

The unflinching earnestness with which he declared these things:--the dark, daring play of his sleepless, excited imagination, and all the preternatural terrors of real delirium, united to invest this Gabriel in the minds of the majority of the ignorant crew, with an atmosphere of sacredness. . . . The sailors, mostly poor devils, cringed, and some of them fawned before him; in obedience to his instructions, sometimes rendering him personal homage, as to a god. (314-5)

Ishmael concludes that "the history of fanatics [is not] half so striking in respect to the measureless self-deception of the fanatic himself, as his measureless power of deceiving and bedeviling so many others," adding that "it is time to return to the Pequod" (315), where Ahab has also gained a "wondrous

ascendancy" over the crew, thanks to his "tricks of the stage," as we shall see.

Enthusiasm, the revolt against the mechanical reduction, has a family resemblance, as Smith indicates, to mass culture: both address the "melancholy and gloomy humour" of the masses in order to manipulate them. In the nineteenth century, romantic mass culture gave rise to new political figures who manipulated the imagination of the masses.⁸ Such figures--especially Napoleon and Andrew Jackson--are practicing crowd psychologists; from their practices, Gustave Le Bon was to derive his pivotal theory of crowd psychology. And since Melville clearly directs the reader to compare Ahab to both Napoleon and Jackson, Le Bon's crowd psychology is likely to tell us much about Ahab.

Notes

1. In Melville: The Ironic Diagram, John Seelye writes similarly:

This mystic circle of inner quietude bordered by strife seems to approximate the "All" that was Nature for the transcendentalists, a supernal peace which has its counterpart in the soul of man. . . . (7)

2. Ahab is repeatedly represented as divided. He has a scar which resembles

that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, loft trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. (123)

Divided by lightening, symbol of enlightenment, Ahab has a contradictory relationship to enlightenment, which he worships and defies.

3. John P. Wright, in The Skeptical Realism of David Hume, argues that "many writers have seen their task as one of recusing [Hume] from the negative skeptical consequences of his theory of ideas" (3). Wright himself argues that Hume's philosophical system "allows one to retain a substantial notion of reality in spite of the contrary evidence of ideas" (4). But if mainstream philosophy has sought to domesticate Hume, theory has not embraced a philosopher who, in fact, calls into question the "substantial notion of reality." The omission is strange, remarks Constantin V. Boundas in his introduction to Deleuze, because Deleuze on Hume powerfully anticipates post-structuralism. Moreover, Jacques Derrida in Writing and Difference seems to acknowledge an affinity, not much followed up, to empiricism, which he calls

a truth more profound than the "logic" of philosophical discourse. . . . It is the dream of a purely heterological thought at its source. A pure thought of pure difference. Empiricism is its philosophical name, its metaphysical pretention or modesty. (151)

In From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History, Hans Aarsleff shows that Locke's nominalist linguistics foreshadows Saussure's structuralist linguistics. In Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Fredric Jameson in a section entitled "Deconstruction as Nominalism" compares Paul DeMan's campaign against "metaphysics" "to the

cultural politics of the great Enlightenment philosophes: their horror of religion, their campaign against superstition and error" (246). Jameson interprets Kant as nineteenth-century idealists interpreted Hume, as "positing an insuperably dualistic world in which human appearance coexists and is impossibly superimposed with an unthinkable and nonhuman world of things-in-themselves (including our own 'selves')." In the nineteenth century, Kant's transcendentalism was understood to have surmounted the dualistic world; nonetheless, Jameson's admirable sentence captures the agonies of "The Whiteness of the Whale," where whiteness corresponds to the

things-in-themselves . . . since they correspond to what lies beyond anthropomorphism, beyond human categories and human senses--what is here before us without us, unseen and untouched, independent of the phenomenological centering of the human body and above all beyond the categories of the human mind. (249)

4. In 1875, James McCosh, president of Princeton, still worried that a man could be led by Hume's "wretched sophistry to deny the necessary relation of cause and effect when it would lead him upward from God's works to God himself" (157). For an excellent discussion of epistemology and causality, see Nicholas Capaldi, David Hume: The Newtonian Philosopher.

5. Unlike antebellum philosophy, most contemporary commentary on the Enlightenment seems not to distinguish between Locke and Hume or among rationalism, empiricism and skepticism. Anthony J. Cascardi writes in The Subject of Modernity,

that the traditions represented by thinkers like Descartes, Hume, and Kant on the one hand, and by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida on the other, must be seen as one tradition and not two, and that the genealogy of the modern age may be seen to conform to the antinomic configuration which together these lines represent. (35)

But Cascardi never defends this typology as such. Hume, in fact, seems to have much in common with the "deconstructive" tradition; he certainly does not adhere to what Cascardi calls the "empiricist conception of facts as immediately apprehended in sense-perception" (36). Only the "vulgar" entertained this common sensible view. The point is that the distinction Cascardi draws between Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment thinkers can be made within the Enlightenment itself.

6. Capaldi argues that Hume defended Newton from the "Newtonian" rationalists who took his physics not as descriptive empiricism, but as substantive-metaphysical. According to Capaldi, Hume

believed that Newton had displaced Aristotle's concept of causality as a transfer of an essential quality between objects, the basis of Aristotle's realism: since the effect partakes of the essence of the cause, we can infer the cause from the effect, in other words, the object from the idea it causes in the mind. The "argument from design" similarly asserts that we can infer the creator--cause--from the creation--effect. After Newton, Hume argues against the rationalists, we can neither infer a cause from an effect nor, it follows, an object from the idea it causes, since there is no transfer of essence.

7. Newton's contemporary fame owed more to his optics than to his physics. Naturphilosophie, a mystical interpretation of science by German romantics including Goethe, Schelling and Lorenz Oken fervently attacked Newton's Opticks. Goethe, according to Emerson, "declared war against the great name of Newton," especially in Goethe's theory of color, which "rejected [Newton's] artificial theory of seven colours, and considered that every colour was the mixture of light and darkness in new proportions" and thereby treated colors "poetically, humanly" (qtd. in Van Cromphout 26). In 1808 Lorenz Oken ridiculed the Opticks as an "untrue and pernicious book" filled with "the most absurd hypotheses ever conceived by man" (qtd. in Modiano 142). Oken's theory of light, as described by Raimonda Modiano, in Coleridge and the Concept of Nature, is characteristic of the romantic science and Naturphilosophie that influenced Emerson. Light is

merely the outward manifestation of a polar tension originating in the ether and propagated by the interaction between the sun and the planet, the two pursuing poles of nature. All optical phenomena for Oken, such as transparency and colour, are the result of a "genuine light process" connected with a polar activity in various entities. "Just as the tension in the ether constitutes light, the tension in earthly matter constitutes colours." Oken interprets the diversity of colours as the expression of varied degrees of tension in the ether. He argues that there are two primal colours, white and black, which are the earthly counterpart of light and darkness in the cosmic sphere, that is, of ether existing either in tension or at rest. . . . [Oken] believed that his analysis of light also provided a full clarification of how the solar system came into existence, viewing the "dispersion of light into colours" as the "visual symbol of the formation of the heavenly bodies." (142-3)

Naturphilosophie cast nature as a dynamic interaction of "ideal

powers . . . according to a principle of polarity" (Modiano 139). It saw "a complicated web of polar forces, operating in distinct though related modes, in both inorganic and organic nature, matter and spirit" (Modiano 141), and in this manner conceived the universe as a living organism with a soul. Reversing the older religiosity, the universe was now "striving toward perfection," as if "the perfect supreme being is not its creator but its telos" (Eichner 15). This telos restored to the universe the organic qualities and moral significance supposedly annihilated by the Enlightenment. For if the universe is "striving toward perfection," the idealist can subordinate evil to the "vast affirmative" as Emerson's "good in the making" ("Fate" 345).

8. On romanticism and mass culture, see Colin Cambell's argument, in The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism, that the

"romantic" ingredient in culture . . . had a crucial part to play in the development of modern consumerism itself; indeed, since consumption may determine demand and demand supply, it could be argued that Romanticism itself played a critical role in facilitating the Industrial Revolution and therefore the character of the modern economy. (2)

Chapter Four:

Ahab and the Rise of the Crowd

I

Ahab's persona is inseparable from the paradox that in mass society elite rule is mediated by the masses. As William Kornhauser writes, mass society can be conceived either as "a set of conditions under which elites are exposed to mass pressures" or, alternately, "as a set of conditions under which non-elites are exposed to elite pressures" (23). In fact, says Kornhauser, mass society is "a social system in which elites are readily accessible to influence by non-elites and non-elites are readily available for mobilization by elites" (39). Ahab's rule over the crew of the *Pequod* precisely mirrors this dynamic, for

he had indirectly laid himself open to the unanswerable charge of usurpation; and with perfect impunity, both moral and legal, his crew if so disposed, and to that end competent, could refuse all further obedience to him, and even violently wrest from him the command. (213)

He must appear to accede to the influence of the crew to prevent "even the barely hinted imputation of usurpation, and the possible consequences of such a suppressed impression gaining ground." He must

still in a good degree continue true to

the . natural, nominal purpose of the Pequod's voyage; observe all customary usages; and not only that, but force himself to evince all his well known passionate interest in the general pursuits of his profession. (213)

Granting the crew "food for their more common, daily appetites" (212), Ahab keeps the crew "suspended for the final dash." Ultimately, Ahab is a crowd psychologist; in the meanwhile, he maintains the fiction of everyday life because he knows if "in times of strong emotion mankind disdain all base considerations . . . such times are evanescent." Like alcohol these times work on men and fade; thus Ahab resolves that "for the present, the hunt should in some way be stripped of that strange imaginative impiousness which naturally invested it; that the full terror of the voyage must be kept withdrawn into the obscure background" (212).

Ahab's rule is marked by the tension between his contempt for and dependency on his crew, who manifest the mechanical principle of Enlightenment: "The permanent constitutional condition of the manufactured man, thought Ahab, is sordidness" (212). "Take mankind in mass," Ishmael agrees, and "they seem a mob of unnecessary duplicates" (466). The impersonality of the carpenter, for example, "so shaded off into the surrounding infinite of things, that it seemed one with the general stolidity discernible in the whole visible world" (467). He is, says Ishmael, a "pure manipulator," an "highly useful" contrivance: "if his superiors wanted to use

the carpenter as a screw-driver, all they had to do was open that part of him" (468). But Ishmael immediately qualifies this view, discerning in the carpenter what Emerson calls in "Experience" a particle of Power which "alights nowhere, but hops perpetually from bough to bough . . . which abides in no man and in no woman, but for a moment speaks from this one, and for another moment from that one" (260). The "carpenter, was, after all," says Ishmael, "no mere machine of an automaton. If he did not have a common soul in him, he had a subtle something that somehow anomalously did its duty. . . . [an] unaccountable, cunning life-principle" (468).

But to Ahab the manufactured masses portend the complete extinction of the "life-principle," as if one could "order a complete man after a desirable pattern" (470). Ahab fiercely resists this idea, resorting to a traditional demonstration of the reality of spirit: "Look," he tells the carpenter, "put thy live leg here in the place where mine once was; so, now, here is only one distinct leg to the eye, yet two to the soul. Where thou feelest tingling life; there, exactly there, there to a hair do I." This phenomenon suggests to Ahab a spiritual reality that transcends matter, for here we have a sensation of a leg without an actual leg. How, then, he asks the carpenter,

doest thou know that some entire, living, thinking thing may not be invisibly and uninterpenetratingly standing precisely where thou now standest? . . . And if I

still feel the smart of my crushed leg,
 though it be now so long dissolved; then,
 why mayst not thou, carpenter, feel the
 fiery pains of hell for ever, and without
 a body? (471)

But if Ahab triumphs philosophically over the mechanical reduction embodied in the manufactured masses, he simultaneously depends on the carpenter and the blacksmith, who make his "dead limb," and by extension the entire crew, who form the "dead limb" of his metaphysical quest: "Here I am, proud as a Greek god, and yet standing debtor to the blockhead for a bone to stand on! . . . I would be free as air; and I'm down in the whole world's books" (471).

The sailors, then, are his tools: "To accomplish his object Ahab must use tools; and of all tools . . . men are most apt to get out of order" (211). Thus Ahab must pay "a heedful closely calculating attention to every minute atmospheric influence which it was possible to his crew to be subjected to" (213).¹ He must grasp the mind of the crew as an effect. Ishmael thus carefully distinguishes Ahab's "subtle insanity" and "superlative sense and shrewdness" (212) from true spiritual power. He is, says Ishmael, one of "those men who become famous more through their infinite inferiority to the choice hidden handful of the Divine Inert, than through their undoubted superiority over the dead level of the mass" (148). Ahab himself admits the limits of his "intellectual" power, a step above the merely "corporeal relation," but not

"purely spiritual" (212). Such "intellectual power" can never "assume the practical, available supremacy over other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base." It is this necessity of employing "external arts and entrenchments" to seduce the masses that keeps "God's true princes of the Empire from the world's hustings." In contrast, "intellectual power" invests an "imperial brain" with "extreme political superstitions," and the "plebeian herds crouch before the tremendous centralization" (148).

Emerging from philosophy and metaphysics but coming to roost in mass politics, Ahab addresses the metaphysical desires represented by idealism but diverts them to political ends. If Ahab belongs to the romantic counter-enlightenment, the revolt against the theory of ideas, he nonetheless personifies the transfer of the theory of ideas to mass politics: even as he decries visible objects as "pasteboard masks," he transforms himself into a visible object, shrewdly calculated to impress the imagination of his crew. Thus on the one hand Ahab defines his revolt against the mechanistic forms of the world: "If money's to be the measurer, man, and the accountants have computed their great counting-house the glove, by girdling it with guineas, one to every three parts of an inch; then, let me tell thee, that my vengeance will fetch a great premium here!" But on the other hand when he smites his chest Stubb says: "Methinks it rings most vast, but

hollow" (163). If we remember that "what in all things makes the sounding-board is this--there's naught beneath" (528), then Ahab, even as he seeks the intelligence that lies beyond repetition, embodies the force of repetition.

II

The elite's paradoxical dependence on the masses produces crowd psychology, the science of deriving power from the very discontents of mass existence--dispossession and disenchantment, communal nostalgia and atomic competition, ennui and meaninglessness. The mastery of crowd psychology defines the towering political figures of the age, Napoleon and Jackson, both models for Ahab. Napoleon became famous for his use of romantic symbolism to rule the masses whom he scorned as "ciphers" who "acquire their value merely from their position" in society (qtd. in Herold, Age 94). Subject to such social reinforcement, the masses become the object of Napoleon's rule by the manipulation of public opinion:

All the factors capable of influencing public opinion were mobilized for the maintenance of his regime--the Church inculcated obedience; the Press suffered a rigid censorship and its news was dispensed through official journals; the stage and the arts were set to the task of glorifying the Emperor; literature, rather unwillingly, was to be harnessed to his chariot; education was organized, with lycées and one central university, to enforce discipline in the academic world; finally, Napoleon's dispatches, comparable indeed with Caesar's, were a series of masterpieces of propaganda. (Cobban 85)

Napoleon's greatest masterpiece of propaganda, however, was Napoleon, his romantic persona,

his appeal to the non-intellectual elements which are the driving forces in men and nations,--his capacity for catching and communicating emotion, his handsome appearance in youth, his charm of manner, his eloquence, and his knack of coining effective phrases. His life was a series of dramatic gestures and he was his own press agent. (Cobban 85-6)

Like Ahab, Napoleon was a "supreme combination of intellect and energy," possessing "a magnetic, almost supernatural power" (Herold, Mind xix), who personified a mythic revolt against the forces of rationalization and commerce--his "ghost," writes Bertrand Russell, "stalks through the age," the only force "strong enough to stand up against industrialism and commerce, pouring scorn on pacifism and shop-keeping" (750). Simultaneously, paradoxically, he was a great "social geometer," a modernizer, whose organization of his life as a "series of dramatic gestures" melded romanticism and mass politics.

Especially in the limited electoral democracy of the United States, mass politics fused with mass culture; the personification of this development was Andrew Jackson, whose election represented the collapse of the old order and the triumph of mass democracy. As John Ward suggests, Jackson skillfully translated his military fame into political power,

recalling to many the career and regime of Napoleon. Jackson, Ward shows, manipulated a range of sentimental and sensational imagery from American mass culture, at once a "man of nature" and a "man of iron." To Ishmael, Jackson symbolizes

that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality! . . . Thou who didst pick up Andrew Jackson from the pebbles; who didst hurl him upon a war-horse; who didst thunder him higher than a throne! Thou who, in all Thy mighty, earthly marchings, ever cullest Thy selectest champions from the kingly common; bear me out in it, O God! (117)

So democratic was Jackson, he brought a drunken mob to the White House to celebrate his inauguration, seemingly to confirm the widespread association of democracy and alcoholism.

However, in spite of the populist rhetoric and mass cultural imagery, Jackson represented not an expansion of popular democracy, but what Sean Wilentz calls the "frustrating power of a professional party politics" to transform a "popular radical challenge . . . into its opposite" (213). Ishmael's paeon to Jackson is next in a series of false investments that lead him to Ahab, for Jackson's democratic populism is more a manipulation of mass culture for elite aims than the authentic political expression

Ishmael salutes. This, indeed, was the trick of mass culture, to simulate populist subversion.

The most extraordinary consequence of Jackson's career, then, was the election of General Harrison to the presidency in 1840. Seeking "a man of nature for their candidate" (Ward 91), the conservative Whigs settled upon Henry Harrison because "he had beaten some Indians at the battle of Tippecanoe and had served with honor in the War of 1812" and "to make his appeal perfect in the eyes of Whig managers, Harrison's political opinions were so hazy that no one could be alienated by them" (Beards 576). Rather than frame a potentially divisive campaign platform, the Whigs ran Harrison as Jackson, "a man of the people," simultaneously attacking Jackson's successor, Martin Van Buren, "as an eastern aristocrat" (Beards 576). The Whigs made the log cabin--"with its evocation of the frontier, the simple life, closeness to nature, and distinctive Americanism" (Ward 93)--a symbol of Harrison's populist roots. They even erected "in every town of importance log cabins from which hard cider was served in copious draughts to stimulate the enthusiasm of the voters" (Beards 577). In the end, they convinced "an electorate suffering a depression that William Henry Harrison stood for, and Martin Van Buren perverted, all the virtues Andrew Jackson had represented" (Ward 93). With the Harrison campaign, conservatives finally jettisoned their rationalist defense of inequality and privilege and learned to package their politics

as populist.

Ultimately, the power of leaders like Napoleon, Jackson and Ahab derives from the manipulation of the regressive psychology of the masses, whose rules are given in Gustave Le Bon's classic The Crowd, based in part, on an analysis of the regime of Napoleon. Mass culture, it turns out, presumes a concept of the unconscious in which the mechanisms of the theory of ideas--association, repetition, and so on--are supplemented by the transfers of energy that fascinated the nineteenth century.

III

In the Third Republic of France, General Boulanger was a third-rate demagogue with an "American-style campaign manager." Projecting an indistinct but strong image of himself as a symbol of the general discontent, Boulanger knit diverse and even antagonistic factions into a coalition which won a temporary electoral victory (Barrows 14). Boulanger's use of symbols to effect a "intellectual" or "spiritual" unity among contentious groups inspired Le Bon's "law of mental unity"--the idea that the symbol, because open to diverse interpretations, by focusing that diversity on a single object, derives from it a kind of unity. When Ahab offers his crew Moby Dick as their "final and romantic object" (212), he relies on this same "law of mental unity."

Indeed, the relationship of Ahab to his crew, perhaps the

most famous representation of politics in nineteenth-century literature, conforms in all respects--the comparison of the crew to "savages," Ahab's theatricality, his oratory, his mesmerism, his mysticism--to the paradigm of crowd psychology. Nor is this correspondence surprising, since the historical roots of crowd psychology are the political events in Europe and the United States that defined Melville's era, especially the international reaction to the French revolution and to the Napoleonic regime.

Deeply rooted in the nineteenth century, filled with anticipations of the twentieth, Gustave Le Bon's The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind helped form the future that Moby-Dick augurs. The supreme scholarly best-seller of its time, The Crowd was at the crossroads of modern politics. Mussolini acknowledged his debt to Le Bon's "massive and profound works" (qtd. in Moscovici 63). Adorno and Horkheimer dismissed Hitler's Mein Kampf as a "cheap copy" of The Crowd (qtd. in Moscovici 64); nevertheless, they agreed that "the assertions of Le Bon have been confirmed to an astonishing degree, at least superficially" (qtd. in Moscovici 56).² However, as Robert Nye says, "the appeal of the new discipline was strongest for the democratic elites who saw it as a conceptual device that confirmed their deepest fears about the masses, but also gave them a body of rules for the manipulation and control of their violent potential" (qtd. in Moscovici 54). Theodore Roosevelt said he read Le Bon "assiduously" (qtd. in

Moscovici 61) and the typical mass cultural industries--entertainment, public relations, politics, advertising--are the intellectual heirs of crowd psychology, for they retain many of its assumptions, although disguised, chief among them, the idea of the regressive psychology of the masses.

For Le Bon, the regressive psychology of the masses originates from the "dissolution of the crowd" and from the intellectual work of the philosophers who

devoted themselves with fervour to the destruction of the religious, political, and social illusions on which our forefathers had lived for a long tale of centuries. By destroying them they have dried up the springs of hope and resignation. Behind the immolated chimeras they came face to face with the blind and silent forces of nature, which are inexorable to weakness and ignore pity. (109)

But if the Enlightenment critique of metaphysics immolates the chimeras of hope and resignation, philosophy

has been unable as yet to offer the masses any ideal that can charm them; but, as they must have their illusions at all costs, they turn instinctively, as the insect seeks the light, to the rhetoricians who accord them what they want. (109)

According to Le Bon, the masses want to destroy "utterly society as it now exists, with a view to making it hark back

to that primitive communism which was the normal condition of all human groups from before the dawn of civilization" (16). Thus the power of the manipulators of the crowd derives from the unconscious "savagism" of the masses, their regressive psychology.

As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen argues in The Freudian Subject, the idea of a "pathological return to a previous state," to "a stage of . . . development that has been surpassed" (135), was central to nineteenth-century psychology. For Le Bon, writes Borch-Jacobsen, the regressive tendency of the crowd "is to the social and political realm what pathological states are to the realm of normalcy--in other words, its buried truth." Crowd psychology, in other words, is essentially the social psychology of modernity. If at first glance the crowd seems to be "a marginal phenomenon or even a transgressive one with respect to normal sociality," in fact the crowd "manifests the deepest essence of normal sociality better than social institutions do" (135). More than a physical event, the crowd is a symptom of the unconscious substrate of normal sociality, of the persistence in modernity of the "savage" mind.

In Moby-Dick, then, we discover not the Freudian unconscious always attributed to Melville, but the prefiguring unconscious of the crowd. As a physical event, the crowd recaptures the feeling of tribal solidarity; the members of the crowd escape the alienated condition of modernity; the "heterogeneous is swamped by the homogeneous" (29) and the

crowd becomes a "single being" (24). In the crowd, mass man suddenly "possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings" (58). This feeling of tribal solidarity arises not only from the physical proximity engendered by the crowd but from the regression to "savage" thinking. The crowd "thinks" like the "savage," "in images." The crowd "scarcely distinguishes between the subjective and the objective. It accepts as real the images evoked in its mind, though they most often have only a very distant relation with the observed fact" (41). The crowd is moved by ideas that are "very simple and very exaggerated. On this point, as on so many others, an individual in a crowd resembles primitive beings." The crowd is "inaccessible to fine distinction, . . . sees things as a whole, and is blind to their intermediate phases." Exaggerated images are transmitted from individual to individual "by a process of suggestion and contagion" (50). These "image-like ideas are not connected by any logical bond of analogy or succession. . . . [T]he most contradictory ideas may be . . . simultaneously current in crowds. . . . Its complete lack of the critical spirit does not allow of its perceiving these contradictions" (61). The crowd associates "dissimilar things possessing a merely apparent connection between each other. . . . It is arguments of this kind that are always presented to crowds by those who know how to manage them" (65).

Freud, Borch-Jacobsen argues, took over the notion of the unconscious directly from Le Bon.³ Like the crowd, the Freudian unconscious is

impervious to contradiction, to logical argumentation; credulous, it knows neither doubt nor degrees of conviction . . . tolerates no lapse between desire and its realization. . . . The only reality it recognizes is psychic reality (image, illusion, the "magic word"). (137)

The psychology of the crowd is finally, Borch-Jacobsen tells us, "nothing but the psychology of the unconscious as Freud had described it on the basis of individual neuroses and dreams. The unconscious, in other words, is the archaic group, sociality or collectivity" (137).

Persisting in the recesses of the mass mind, the "archaic group, sociality or collectivity" is inseparable from the manipulability of the crowd, its infinite receptivity to suggestion:

The crowd may be said to be the unconscious "itself," the crowd-unconscious or the mass-unconscious: neither substratum nor substructure, but rather a soft, malleable, plastic, infinitely receptive material without will or desire or any specific instinct of its own. (139)

In one of Borch-Jacobsen's most telling formulations, the crowd is so manipulable that it approaches the condition of a

"medium," a field of nearly instantaneous "thought transmission" or "telepathy."

The transfusion or merging of subjects is such, here [i.e. in the crowd], that one can no longer speak of communication (feelings, opinions, but also "communication between unconsciousness") because there are simply no more subjects communicating among themselves: the members of the crowd are merely mediums controlled (entranced, possessed) by suggestion. (140)

If the crowd, defined by its susceptibility to suggestion, is the "buried truth" of normal sociality in the Gesellschaft, it points to the ultimate source of political power in modernity--the unconscious, the pull of the "archaic group, sociality or collectivity," in other words, the yearning for community among the masses. Political power accrues to those who accord the masses "what they want," that is, to the "leader of the crowd."

First and foremost, the leader of the crowd is an orator. Embracing the "entire mechanism" of oratory, the leader gives a "mysterious power" to his words, knowing that the most "symbolic" words, portentous yet devoid of meaning, are the most effective: "words whose sense is the most ill-defined are sometimes those that possess the most influence," for their "images" are evoked "independent of their sense . . . the word is merely as it were the button of an electric bell that calls them up" (103). In discussing those who know how to manage

crowds, Le Bon's "savagist" rhetoric turns mechanistic; possessed of the "enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings," the individual in the crowd is "no longer himself, but has become an automaton"; the crowd is "at the mercy of all external exciting causes, [reflecting] their incessant variations. It is the slave of the impulses which it receives," the creature, in other words of its leader (36).

But when we turn to the leader--one of those "morbidly nervous, excitable, half-deranged persons who are bordering on madness," "hypnotised by the idea, whose apostle he has since become," possessed by an idea "to such a degree that everything outside it vanishes, and that every contrary opinion appears to him an error or a superstition" (117)--we find that he is not so much the "cause" as an "effect" of the crowd. His function is largely the symbolic one ascribed to him by Le Bon's "law of mental unity," the idea that the crowd becomes a "single being" by virtue of the fact that all its members are focused on a single object, so that "the sentiments and ideas of all the persons in that gathering take one and the same direction, and their conscious personality vanishes" (123). Invested by the crowd with a mysterious power, the leader's "will is the nucleus around which the opinions of the crowd are grouped and attain to identity" (117).

"The Quarter-Deck" evokes the earliest images of crowd psychology: "the complete metamorphosis of spectators in a theater, and the 'electrification' of an audience by an orator" (Barrows 118). Indeed, Melville stresses the theatricality of Ahab's performance, rendered in play form throughout; Ahab, guided by stage directions, ringed by special effects, enters and declaims dramatic poetry in histrionic soliloquies. Hours before his entrance, his "steady, ivory stride was heard" throughout the ship, as if he were, as Le Bon said, "hypnotised by the idea, whose apostle he has since become": "You could almost see that thought turn in him as he turned, and pace in him as he paced; so completely possessing him, indeed, that it all but seemed the inward mould of every outer movement" (160). Finally coming "to a halt by the bulwarks, and inserting his bone leg into the auger-hole there, and with one hand grasping a shroud, he ordered Starbuck to send everybody aft" (161). The auger-hole, Ishmael noted earlier, is deliberately placed so that Ahab can steady his "bone leg" and assume a Napoleonic pose,

one arm elevated, and holding by a shroud
 . . . erect, looking straight out beyond
 the ship's ever-pitching prow. There was
 an infinity of firmest fortitude, a
 determinate, unsunderable wilfulness,
 in the fixed and fearless, forward
 dedication of that glance. (124)

Now:

Vehemently pausing, he cried:--

"What do ye do when ye see a whale, men?"

"Sing out for him!" was the impulsive rejoinder from a score of clubbed voices.

"Good!" cried Ahab, with a wild approval in his tones; observing the hearty animation into which his unexpected question had so magnetically thrown them. (161)

Ahab understands that "to know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds is to know at the same time the art of governing them," as Le Bon says of Napoleon, who

understood how the imagination of the crowd should be impressed. His constant preoccupation was to strike it. He bore it in mind in his victories, in his harangues, in his speeches, in all his acts. On his deathbed it was still in his thoughts. (69)

Of all leaders, Napoleon grasped that "appearances have always played a much more important part than reality in history, where the unreal is always of greater moment than the real" (68). And if history is the progress of unreality, then politics are inextricably theatrical, for "nothing has a greater effect on the imagination of crowds," Le Bon remarks, "than theatrical representations" (68).⁴

In fashioning Ahab, Joel Porte argues, Melville drew upon the popular--violently declamatory, melodramatic, crowd-pleasing--Shakespeare of the antebellum period.⁵ Ahab,

whatever his metaphysical pretensions, is really "a kind of Nantucket Junius Brutus Booth, stamping the boards of the quarter-deck with a loony high-seriousness that is at once darkly powerful and overblown" (200). Porte suggests that Melville had in mind a recent feud, laden with political overtones, between the American actor Edwin Forrest, who personified the popular Shakespeare, and William Charles Macready, the aristocratic English Shakespearean. This conflict was itself the basis of many popular plays in which a "rough-and-ready American told off (and often enough knocked down) a pompous aristocratic Englishman." Hardly distinguishing between these performances and the underlying political issues,

audiences cheered such confrontations enthusiastically, even climbing onto the stage to join the battle. For these people, at least, the early-nineteenth-century theater was still partly a participatory, rather than just a spectator, institution. (American Social History Project 295)

The displacement of political energies onto mass culture was as true of New York's literary elite who embraced Macready's more stately demeanor, as of the flamboyant, alcoholic, working-class subculture--the B'hoys--centered on the Bowery, a row of brothels, grogeries, gambling halls and theaters, which championed the popular Shakespeare.

The B'hoys threw up a political figure, Mike Walsh, of

much originality and interest. For "the men of the Bowery," writes Sean Wilentz, "Walsh's workingman's garb, stagy mannerisms, and contempt for aristocratic snobs must have seemed a political extension of the performances at the Bowery Theatre" (329). Journalist, editor, gang leader, alcoholic, party politician, celebrity, anticapitalist radical, Walsh charted a ferocious course through antebellum mass culture and leftist politics, the "Napoleon" of New York's "shirtless democracy." "Profane, sarcastic, and belligerent," Sean Wilentz writes, "Walsh hardly invented the use of crowds as party political tools, but he certainly helped perfect the craft, and turned it to new, insurgent political ends" (328).

Melville, Porte continues, may well have been thinking as the context for Ahab of the Astor Place theater riots, when supporters of Forest rioted at a performance by Macready--the apotheosis of the "shirtless democracy." At the following day's rally to protest the numerous deaths, Walsh delivered an "inflammatory" speech "about the murderous aristocracy" (Wilentz 359). But while to many these events resembled the European revolutions of 1848, the Astor Place riot was, writes Sean Wilentz, a "nebulous form of class conflict," in which political passions were expressed in "violent cultural terms," "a cruel comedy, an atavistic explosion void of organized politics, radicalism or anything approaching an articulate consciousness of class" (359). Ahab's crusade for the whale, replete with hammer and red flag, icons of the French 1848 (L.

Reynolds 97-124), can be understood similarly as a "political extension of the performances of the Bowery Theatre."

V

In "The Quarter-Deck," Ahab's stalwart pose recalls Walsh similarly posed in workingman's garb on the frontispiece of his speeches; "it is unclear," comments Wilentz, "whether the look in Walsh's eyes owed more to enthusiasm or to drink" (plate 19, 216-7). Ahab must, as Ishmael puts it, federate "along one keel" the de-tribalized individuals of the Pequod, for "they were nearly all Islanders in the Pequod, Isolatoos too, I call such, not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each Isolato living on a separate continent of his own" (121). Absent a "common continent of men," Ahab offers the crew the white whale as its "final and romantic object" (212): "This is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out. What say ye, men, will ye splice hands of it, now?" (163).

As the crew "splice hands," they become a "single being," grouped around the nucleus of Ahab's will, forming a kind of a spiral. Like Jackson, Harrison and Walsh, Ahab introduces alcohol into politics, to stimulate the enthusiasm of the sailors by unleashing their "savage" energies:

Receiving the brimming pewter, and
turning to the harpooners, he ordered

them to produce their weapons. Then ranging them before him near the capstan, with their harpoons in their hands, while his three mates stood at his side with their lances, and the rest of the ships company formed a circle round the group; he stood for an instant searchingly eyeing every man of his crew.

"Drink and pass!" he cried, handing the heavy charged flagon to the nearest seaman. "The crew alone now drink. Round with it, round! Short-draughts--long swallows, men; 'tis hot as Satan's hoof. So, so; it goes round excellently. It spiralizes in ye. (165)"

Simultaneously, then, he appoints the three "savage" harpooners to positions of symbolic importance, to facilitate the regression to the tribal past. The name "Pequod" now refers at once to the "dissolution of the tribe"--the extermination of the Indian--and to its simulated double--the crowd. Now, "eagerly and impetuously the savage crew . . . hailed the announcement of this quest," for the "White Whale fully incites the hearts of [the] savage crew, and playing round their savageness even breeds a certain generous knight-errantism in them . . . for the love of [which] they give chase to Moby Dick" (212).

The sheer theatricality of his spectacle moves Ahab after he dismisses his "frantic crew" and withdraws to his cabin to compare himself to Napoleon; the necessity of the performance forms his "Iron Crown of Lombardy": although it is "bright with many a gem; I, the wearer, see not its far flashings; but darkly feel that I wear that, that dazzlingly confounds." The

performance that he "darkly feels" marks his entry into a mechanistic mass politics: "My one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve"; such a politics, he fears, depletes the original metaphysical impulse: "Like so many anthills of powder, they all stand before me; and I their match. Oh, hard! that to fire others, the match itself must needs be wasting!" (167-8). Linking his performance to explosive, mechanistic force, Ahab's rhetoric suggests that the underlying metaphor of crowd psychology, and modern politics generally, is energy itself.

VI

Indeed, the "Quarter-Deck" suggests the centrality of electricity, and of mesmerism, to Ahab's efforts to form a crowd:

"Advance, ye mates! Cross your lances full before me. Well done! Let me touch the axis." So saying, with extended arm, he grasped the three level, radiating lances at their crossed centre; while so doing, suddenly and nervously twitched them; meanwhile, glancing intently from Starbuck to Stubb; from Stubb to Flask. It seemed as though, by some nameless, interior volition, he would fain have shocked into them the same fiery emotion accumulated within the Leyden jar of his own magnetic life. The three mates quailed before his strong, sustained, and mystic aspect. . . .

"In vain!" cried Ahab; "but, maybe, 'tis well. For did ye three but once take the full-forced shock, then mine own electric thing, that had perhaps expired from out of me." (165-6)

Ahab conflates electricity, mesmerism (magnetism), mysticism and the kind of political power described by crowd psychology, suggesting their equivalence in the nineteenth-century.

Electricity had a curious history, at first a great triumph of science and the Enlightenment, of which it became a symbol--Benjamin Franklin's experiment with the kite "virtually symbolized the Enlightenment's reduction of God's mysterious light to the level of human explanation" (Lewis 142). In their response to science and enlightenment, the romantics seized upon electricity as the universal fluid--as itself "God's mysterious light." "A light was struck with electricity," declared Coleridge, "that in every sense of the word it may be affirmed to have electrified the whole form of natural philosophy" (342). The romantics found in electricity an alternative to Newton's colliding atoms, a romantic theory of causality as continuous interactions along a circuit. "Unlike bodies," writes Leon Chai of romantic causality, for which electricity was the model,

energies or forces act by their very nature upon other bodies or forces. These acts produce a transmission of energy from one force to another. The result forms a continuous process, rather than a series of discrete interactions. (Chai 223)

With electricity, the romantics revitalized precisely that archaic theory of causality which Hume sought to dispel.

Unlike Newtonian causality, romantic causality did not lead to the distinction between idea and object; to the contrary, it seemed to overcome this dualism, as when Emerson in his famous image of the "transparent eyeball" from "Nature," "electrified" optics: "I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (24).

At the same time, Emerson was at pains to distinguish between the metaphysics of electricity and mass cultural tricks, between the "currents of the Universal Being" and the spectacles of the "electrician": "Now there is this difference between the electrician . . . and the Idealist," he wrote to Margaret Fuller, "namely, that the spark is to that philosopher a toy, but the dance is to the idealist terror and beauty, life and light" (183). Emerson alludes to a long tradition of electrical entertainment that weirdly anticipated idealist rhetoric by wiring humans together in an electrical circuit, stemming from the invention of the Leyden Jar, a kind of battery, which

enabled scientists to produce electrical effects on a grand scale. . . . Scores of aspiring scientists, delighted with the opportunity to display their talents, employed Leyden jars to produce miniature bolts of lightning and peals of thunder that did not fail to ignite the imagination of the man in the salon. Wealthy amateur scientists provided entertainment for the masses by discharging Leyden jars through circuits composed of human beings. (Tartar 51)

Thus the history of electricity suggests the paradox associated with Ahab of metaphysical meanings bent to mass cultural purposes, a paradox deepened by Melville's frequent references to mesmerism.

If crowd psychology, which compared the individual in a crowd to the subject of hynosis, had applied "suggestion theory" to sociology, as Borch-Jacobsen writes, earlier "suggestion theory" had applied electrical science to spiritual healing. Anton Mesmer modeled his Baquet, supposed to facilitate the flow of the magnetic fluid, after the Leyden jar:

[A] cord, attached at one end to the tub, was passed round the body of each of the sitters, so as to bind them all into a chain. . . . Mesmer, in a lilac robe, and his assistant operators--vigorous and handsome young men selected for the purpose--walked about the room, pointing their fingers or an iron rod held in their hands at the diseased parts.
(Podmore 6)

Mesmer, says, Henri Ellenberger, imagined his fluid to have "poles, streams, discharges, conductors, isolators, and accumulators" (63). Ministering to the patient, directing the magnetic fluid, the mesmerist produces a cathartic discharge of fluid, vividly depicted by a French commission of 1784: set apart in the Salle des Crisis, Mesmer's patients were

shaken and tormented by convulsions. . .

. accompanied by expectorations of a viscous matter, torn from the chest by the violence of the attack. . . . The convulsions are characterized by involuntary spasmodic movements of the limbs and of the whole body, by contractions of the throat, by spasms of the hypochondriac and epigastric regions; the eyes are wandering and distracted; there are piercing cries, tears, hiccoughs, and extravagant laughter. The convulsions are preceded and followed by a state of languor and reverie, by exhaustion and drowsiness. (qtd. in Podmore 7)

This crisis, which blasts through blockages to restore the equilibrium of fluids in the body, anticipates the eruption of the pent-up energies of the crowd.

Indeed, crowd psychology retained much of mesmerism and electrical science; the application of "suggestion theory" to sociology was simultaneously the application of electrical science to society. If Le Bon spoke of a surpassed state of "primitive communism," mesmerism similarly posited an original harmony when a "subtile physical fluid fills the universe and forms a connecting medium between man, the earth and the heavenly bodies, and also between man and man" (Ellenberger 62). If Le Bon saw a sharp break with the past, in mesmerism the original harmony is also disrupted, so that the fluid, unevenly distributed in the body, accumulates at various blockages and causes disease. And like the mesmerist, the leader of the crowd attracts, conducts, accumulates and discharges through circuits of human beings the free-floating,

"primitive" energy unleashed by the "dissolution of the tribe."

Mesmerism had the aspect of a reform and was closely associated with liberal reforms in England and the United States. Fusing mesmerism with utopianism, Mesmer's followers adapted his spiritual healing to nineteenth-century idealism, to which Mesmer himself, in spite of his "rationalism," had contributed much through his influence on German Naturphilosophie. But if utopian mesmerists realized mesmerism's implicit social metaphors--the implied commentary on the decline of group life, and the means, prefigured in the Baquet and the circuit of human beings, to refashion it--Le Bon inverted their significance; no longer therapeutic, the "pathological return to a previous state" and the "crisis" now enslave the individual in the crowd, "mesmerized" by a disease-like "contagion" of mass "suggestion," entranced, the law of mental unity stipulates, by a symbol. And if, as Leo Löwenthal remarked, twentieth-century "mass culture is psychoanalysis in reverse" (qtd. in Jay 173), nineteenth-century mass culture was mesmerism in reverse. Since the spectacles of mesmerism, like those of electrical science, proved a potent form of mass culture, mass culture seemed, by extension, to partake of the regressive psychology of mesmerism, also entrancing its audience with an imaginary spectacle that bypassed the conscious mind and reached the "primitive" region of the mass mind.

VII

In "The Candles," Melville dramatizes the underlying electrical metaphor of crowd psychology. Just as for Le Bon crowd psychology begins in the encounter with the "blind and silent forces of nature," "The Candles" begins with a typhoon bursting like an "exploding bomb" upon the Pequod, an electrical storm which the crew cannot abide, as indicated by their responses--Starbuck's Christian interpretation, Stubb's comic plea, "The corpusants have mercy on us all!" (506), and the crew's entrancement by the storm. In contrast, Ahab, like an electrical scientist or a mesmerist, immediately grasps the value of the storm as sheer spectacle laden with metaphysical significance, and sees, like a crowd psychologist, its impact on the sailors suddenly shaken in their common sense. Thus Ahab immediately associates himself with the storm:

At that moment in one of the intervals of profound darkness, following the flashes, a voice was heard at his side; and almost at the same instant a volley of thunder peals rolled overhead.

"Who's there?"

"Old Thunder!" said Ahab, groping his way along the bulwarks to his pivot-hole; but suddenly finding his path made plain to him by elbowed lances of fire. (505)

Throughout the chapter, stage directions call forth the lightening at pivotal moments, reminding us of Ahab's ultimate theatricality. Refusing to lower the ship's rods to draw off

the "perilous fluid," Ahab deliberately sets the scene for his electrifying performance. The result is a kind of sensationalist tableau full of fire and smoke:

All the yard-arms were tipped with a pallid fire; and touched at each tri-pointed lightning-rod-end with three tapering white flames, each of the three tall masts was silently burning in that sulphurous air, like three gigantic wax tapers before an altar. (505)

The "enchanted crew" standing in one "thick cluster . . . all their eyes gleaming in that pale phosphorescence" (506) is now like

an individual immersed . . . in a crowd . . . in consequence of the magnetic influence given out by the crowd . . . in a special state, which much resembles the state of fascination in which the hypnotised individual finds himself in the hands of the hypnotiser. (Le Bon 31)

In contrast, the "savages," symbols of regression to the tribal past, appear actually to conduct the electrical fluid:

Relieved against the ghostly light, the gigantic jet negro, Daggoo, loomed up to thrice his real stature, and seemed the black cloud from which the thunder had come. The parted mouth of Tashtego revealed his shark-white teeth, which strangely gleamed as if they too had been tipped by corpusants; while lit up by the preternatural light, Queequeg's tattooing burned like Satanic blue flames on his

body. (506)

Near the climax of the spectacle, Ahab takes hold of the "main mast links," an extraordinary gesture meant to finally bind the crew to him and to his "fiery hunt":

"Aye, aye, men!" cried Ahab. "Look up at it; mark it well; the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale! Hand me those main-mast links there; I would fain feel this pulse, and let mine beat against it; blood against fire!" (507)

His bold declaration of "blood against fire" penetrates to the deepest regions of the mass unconscious to attract and conduct its free-floating energies to his object. Finally, then, Ahab transforms himself into a lightening rod:

Then turning--the last link held fast in his left hand, he put his foot upon the Parsee; and with fixed upward eye, and high-flung right arm, he stood erect before the lofty tri-pointed trinity of flames. (507)

Ahab now appears to be to electrical energy what he is to the "savage" energies of the crew--its lightening rod.

In the final closing of the circuit, Ahab wields the energy of the crew against them. "Lashed in its conspicuous crotch," Ahab's harpoon then emits a levelled flame of pale, forked fire"; and

Ahab, snatching the burning harpoon . . . waved it like a torch among them; swearing to transfix with it the first sailor that but cast loose a rope's end. Petrified by his aspect, and still more shrinking from the fiery dart that he held, the men fell back in dismay, and Ahab again spoke:--

"All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound. And that ye may know to what tune this heart beats: look ye here; thus I blow out the last fear!" And with one blast of his breath he extinguished the flame. . . . [A]t those last words of Ahab's many of the mariners did run from him in a terror of dismay. (508)

Ahab's manipulation of the storm plays upon the "instinctive" tendency of mind to endow natural forces with symbolic value.⁷ This process is no longer spontaneous and "natural"; rather, the symbol is calculated precisely as a lightening rod for mass energies, suggesting that political energy, like all energy, obeys the laws of attraction, conduction and discharge.

VIII

Amid the electrical spectacle of "The Candles," Ahab reiterates the ruling paradox of his character: his contradictory relationship to Enlightenment represented by the "clear spirit of light." Ahab simultaneously declares his loathing for the mechanical principle and proclaims himself the offspring of the Enlightenment, indicated by his manipulation of electrical fluid:

"Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. . . . No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. . . . Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breath it back to thee. (507)

In "The Quarter-Deck," Ahab says the whale is the "wall" of the unreasoning mechanical world of enlightenment, beyond which he glimpses some "still reasoning thing," some form of intelligence inherent in the lawful necessity of cause and effect and the correspondence of idea and object. Now, he similarly proclaims "some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical. Through thee, thy flaming self, my scorched eyes do dimly see it" (508).

In taking this defiant stance, Ahab aligns himself with the deepest purposes of the mystical tradition, represented by Fedallah, the Parsee, who preserves "the ghostly aboriginalness of the earth's primal generations" (231), upon whom Ahab literally stands. Not only does Ahab allude to Gnostic and Hermetic themes, he also partakes of the mystical resistance to the mechanical reduction, from the communist

sects of the English revolution to the Spiritualist utopians of the nineteenth century.⁸ The "fiery hunt" harbors the mystical desire to participate in nature to make a meaning, at odds with the mechanical reduction which strips nature of its spiritual intelligence and reduces the subject to a spectator of ideas that may or may not correspond to real objects.

At the same time, the ubiquitous number three in the imagery of "The Candles," suggests, by way of the Oedipal story, Ahab's rivalrous identification with his "father," as he now addresses the Enlightenment: "There burn the flames! Oh, thou magnanimous! now I do glory in my genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother, I know not. Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her? There lies my puzzle." In this context, Ahab's "mother" corresponds to the "real Being" lost to enlightenment. To reclaim his mother--the "unsuffusing thing"--he challenges his father; to challenge his father, however, is to become his father: "I leap with thee; I burn with thee; would fain be welded with thee; defyingly I worship thee!" (507-8). His plight mirrors the fate of romanticism, destined to deliver its resources to mass society.

IX

When we compare the fates of Ahab and Ishmael--the former annihilated, the latter saved--we find a restatement of the dualism of the sentimental and the sensational, the poles of

mass culture between which Ishmael has continually oscillated. This dualistic formula precludes our taking Ishmael's ostensible salvation at face value, especially since Ishmael has already warned the reader that the voyage is entirely delusional.

In "The Try-Works," for example, Melville describes an incredible scene that might represent the sensationalist pole of mass culture:

The hatch, removed from the top of the works, now afforded a wide hearth in front of them. Standing on this were the Tartarean shapes of the pagan harpooners, always the whale-ship's stokers. . . . Opposite the mouth of the works, on the further side of the wide wooden hearth, was the windlass. This served for a sea-sofa. Here lounged the watch, when not otherwise employed, looking into the red heat of the fire, till their eyes felt scorched in their heads. Their tawny features, now all begrimed with smoke and sweat, their matted beards, and the contrasting barbaric brilliancy of their teeth, all these were strangely revealed in the capricious emblazonings of the works. As they narrated to each other their unholy adventures, their tales of terror told in words of mirth; as their uncivilized laughter forked upwards out of them, like the flames from the furnace; as to and fro, in their front, the harpooners wildly gesticulated with their huge pronged forks and dippers; as the wind howled on, and the sea leaped, and the ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hell further and further into the blackness of the sea and the night, and scornfully champed the white bone in her mouth, and viciously spat round her on all sides; then the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden with fire, and burning a

corpse, and plunging into the blackness of darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander's soul. (423)

Ishmael, then, who has been "in some enchanted way, inverted" by the "Tartarean shapes" of mass culture, awakens suddenly at the tiller and is "faced back" in time to save the Pequod. Rejecting the sensationalist tableau, Ishmael reverts to the sentimental:

Believe not the artificial fire, when its redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun, the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the glorious golden, glad sun, the only true lamp--all others but liars! (424)

Then in the epilogue, Ishmael, "floating on the margin of the ensuing scene" of the Pequod's sinking, is

slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex. When I reached it, it had subsided to a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of the slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital centre, the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost one whole day and night, I floated on a soft

and dirge-like main. The unharmed sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. (573)

In this final paragraph, Ishmael, reaches his "vital centre," buoyed up by the "coffin life-buoy," whose transformation from coffin to life-buoy is representative of the saving power of the dialectic. In contrast to the explosive vortex of Ahab's annihilation, Ishmael achieves the harmonious equilibrium, the reconciliation with the world, which he sought by his voyage upon the Pequod. But since, as already stated, the entire voyage is by Ishmael's admission delusional, we should say that the very figure of equilibrium entails a new phase in the progress of unreality, in the history of metaphysical delusion, inseparable from a transition marked by the contrast between Moby-Dick and "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street," the subject of the next chapter.'

Notes

1. Weather was an early trope for determinism, as the qualities of peoples were ascribed to climatic conditions, such that northerners are thrifty, southerners gregarious, and so on.

2. Nor is it difficult to see in The Crowd the origins of Horkheimer's and Adorno's "dialectic of enlightenment" which produces mass society.

3. Borch-Jacobsen shows how Freud in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego appropriated Le Bon's work, all the while proclaiming his originality and superiority to Le Bon.

4. Theater proves particularly interesting to Le Bon because it both partakes of crowd psychology and averts its worst consequences. If, on the one hand, "the entire audience," like the crowd, "experiences at the same time the same emotions," on the other hand, the audience, unlike the crowd, remains passive; its "emotions are not at once transformed into acts . . . because the most unconscious spectator cannot ignore that he is the victim of illusions, and that he has laughed or wept over imaginary adventures" (68).

5. Also see Peter Bellis, No Mysteries Out of Ourselves: Ahab's "dramatic form privilege[s] action over interpretation, in an attempt to reproduce the reality and truth of 'undoubted deeds'" (115).

6. In Exiled Waters: Moby-Dick and the Crisis of Allegory, Bainard Cowan writes:

Turned upside down the harpoon sockets become "murderous chalices" to hold the liquor he passes among his crew. As symbola they annul differences by calling for an unconscious assent. The inversion of the harpoon points indicates their displacement from their cultural function, the purpose for which they were designed, and their reappropriation as imaginary objects, or images, operating in a realm where signifiers no longer exist in a conscious system of exchange but manifest the power of the other over the self, conveying the force of desire and enthrallment rather than any specific meaning. (97)

7. "The Needle" replays "The Candles." Inverted by an electrical shock, the mariners's needle inspires superstitious associations among the crew, excluding the "pagan harpooners," who are contrastingly "impressed" by "a certain magnetism shot into their congenial hearts from inflexible Ahab's."

Accessory, perhaps, to the impulse dictating the thing he was now about to do, were certain prudential motives, whose object might have been to revive the spirits of his crew by a stroke of his subtile skill, in a matter so wondrous as that of the inverted compasses. Besides, the old man well knew that to steer by transported needles, though clumsily practicable, was not a thing to be passed over by superstitious sailors, without some shudderings and evil portents. (518)

Then he goes "through some strange motions" with an "iron rod"-- "whether indispensable to the magnetizing of the steel, or merely intended to augment the awe of the crew, is uncertain." (518)

8. Morris Berman in The Reenchantment of the World argues that Hermeticism, thought to have originated in the writings of an Egyptian priest, encompassing astrology, alchemy and the magic arts, shadowed the course of the Enlightenment, an alternative epistemology. The Enlightenment reduced the world to a representation for a spectator and narrowed human participation in nature to technical proficiency. But for the mystics knowledge entailed the imaginative identification of the subject with the object: to know was to participate with nature in making a meaning. Thus mystical knowledge yields the unity of the knower and the known and fosters a sense of belonging to a cosmos. Hermeticism exerted a strong influence on pre-Enlightenment culture, but was progressively eradicated from official culture. Nevertheless, medieval heretics, communist sectarians and Christian socialists fused mysticism and communitarian politics, whose heritage Ahab exploits.

9. In Pierre, or The Ambiguities, Melville reconfigures the themes of Moby-Dick. The letter from Isabel induces Pierre's skeptical crisis; suddenly revolted by the debased sociality of the Gesellschaft, Pierre embraces various idealist practices-- enthusiasm, mysticism, bohemianism. In the end, a form of repetition--the resembling portrait--thwarts his idealization of Isabel and exposes the diversion of sexual energy to the idealist symbol. The context for this is mass culture, represented by the division in the novel between pastoral sentimentalism and urban sensationalism and the necessity of producing for the mass market, which derails Pierre's career as author.

Chapter Five:

"Bartleby, the Scrivener" and Common Sense

I

In "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" the "heated" materials of Moby-Dick seem to have cooled and settled into a new equilibrium represented by the narrator's office and by the formal quality of the story. According to Michael Paul Rogin, "Bartleby" takes place "not at the explosive apogee of Jacksonian politics, but after its exhaustion" (193). If, Rogin writes, "Jacksonian politics gave birth to Ahab," ultimately, "that democratic promise is a failure in 'Bartleby,'" in which politics only "appears in the margins of this story" (192-3). But democratic politics have not failed, as Rogin says; rather "Bartleby" shows their success since they represent not "democracy," but what Sean Wilentz calls the "frustrating power of a professional party politics" to transform a "popular radical challenge . . . into its opposite" (213). If there appears to be a sharp break between crowd psychology in Moby-Dick and the narrator in "Bartleby," the former is actually the "buried truth" of the latter, for the conventional consciousness of the narrator arises from the success of the mass manipulation demonstrated in Moby-Dick. Moby-Dick reflects a phase of history dominated by the leader and the diversion of romantic idealism to mass politics; "Bartleby" reflects a later phase dominated by the public.

Gustave Le Bon alluded to the public as the successor to the crowd when he speculated that the leader of the crowd might be replaced by the "periodical publications which manufacture opinions for their readers and supply them with ready-made phrases which absolve them of the trouble of reasoning" (120). For him, the press embodied the force of repetition, earlier grasped by Napoleon,

who said that there is only one figure in rhetoric of serious importance, namely, repetition. The thing affirmed comes by repetition to fix itself in the mind in such a way that it is accepted in the end as a demonstrated truth.

This power is due to the fact that the repeated statement is embedded in the long-run in those profound regions of our unconscious selves in which the motives of our actions are forged. . . . To this circumstance is due the astonishing power of advertisements. (125)

Reasoning similarly, French crowd psychologist Gabriel Tarde conceived the public as a "spiritualized crowd," a purely "intellectual collectivity [collectivité spirituelle], a scattering of physically separated individuals whose cohesion is only mental" (qtd. in Giner 60).¹ Mass media extends "suggestion" to society as a whole--"suggestion à distance." Ultimately, the media form a new pseudo-collectivity--public opinion--which eclipses the crowd as the object of political manipulation.

The public entails a conventional social consciousness

which Melville calls "common sense." Common sense harkens back to the naive realism which Hume attributed to the "vulgar," whose willingness to ascribe their ideas to objects distinguished them from the philosophers who embraced the theory of ideas. Common sense, oblivious to the fact that we perceive not objects, but ideas--ultimately, our ideas--takes the objectivity of the world for granted, and implicitly denies that repetition--habit and custom--produce the illusion of objective qualities. In mass society thinking, mass consciousness similarly attributes the effects of social arrangements, habit, custom, and mass media, to the world itself, oblivious to the power of the "repeated statement." Like the related concept of ideology, common sense and mass consciousness entail a psychologically integrated polity, which grasps the Gesellschaft as purely natural, rather than historically contrived.

A man of common sense, the narrator of "Bartleby" implicitly suppresses the principle of repetition, indicative of the mass-mediated public which denies that experience is mediated and instead takes the world as an objective given. In contrast, the work of the scrivener's office, the copying of law documents represented by Bartleby, alludes to the power of the "repeated statement," the "astonishing power" of advertising, of repetition itself. The advent of Bartleby shows, then, that the narrator's common sense is delusional; it derives from the work of copying, from the "foundation of

custom and repetition" (Hume, Treatise 166-67; bk. 1, pt. 3, sec. 9); nevertheless, it asserts, to the contrary, the principles of Thomas Reid's philosophy of Common Sense.

Ultimately, the narrator represents what the authors of A History of Philosophy in America call a "midcentury marriage" of idealism and Common Sense (Flower and Murphey 427). Reid's Common Sense philosophy became the academic orthodoxy in the United States at a time when the entire "moral basis of the social order," as Terence Martin writes, was "fundamentally at stake in philosophy."² Waging a campaign to restore common sense by refuting Hume's skepticism and Locke's theory of ideas, Reid propounded the principles of the psychological incorporation of the masses.

In 1829, Alexander Everett wrote in the North American Review that as a consequence of the "long rain of disasters which accompanied" the French Revolution, there arose a "strong prejudice against the moral and political theories which prevailed about the time of its opening."

The leading principle of this work, that all our ideas are either received through the senses or obtained by reflection upon such as are so received, was looked upon as the root of all modern heresies; and was therefore to be set aside at all hazards. In order to contest this principle with success, it was necessary to show, that such of our notions as are not the immediate results of sensation are original possessions of the mind. This is the old theory of innate ideas, which has accordingly been revived with a sort of a passion by most of the anti-

revolutionary philosophers of the present day, and has even been adopted . . . by many of the adherents of the liberal political school. (30)

The reversion to the old theory of innate ideas took two principle forms, German idealism and Reid's Common Sense philosophy. Victor Cousin, who popularized idealism in France, stressed that both Kant, representative of German idealism, and Reid demonstrated "practical laws which depend on the constitution of human reason itself, laws which are not derived from experience and which alone make experience possible" (qtd. in Reid, Inquiry and Essays xlii).³ Unlike the speculative geniuses of German idealism, Reid sought to disseminate idealism to the masses by defending "the common sense of mankind" from the theory "that there can be no such thing as a material world . . . [that there] can be nothing else but sensations in the mind, or images of those sensations in the memory and imagination" ("Principles" 165).⁴ By denying that we perceive ideas rather than objects, Reid furnished the philosophical basis of mass consciousness, of that naive realism which unquestioningly takes the world for granted, represented by the conventional consciousness of the narrator of "Bartleby."

In "Bartleby," politics takes the form of a crisis, as common sense confronts its underpinnings, revealed by Bartleby, in repetition. The crisis of common sense is simultaneously moral, epistemological, mathematical and

thermodynamic, for these discourses all contributed to common sense.

II

At the time of the story, the narrator of "Bartleby" is a Master of Chancery, among those lawyers who, he says, "never addresses a jury or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquillity of a snug retreat do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds" (635). He partakes of the blindness of antebellum common sense, for such activities never appear questionable to him, in spite of the contradiction they ostensibly offer to the Christian virtue of self-sacrifice and to the democratic ethos.

The reconciliation of Christian virtue and the capitalist ideal of self-interest was produced by Scottish intellectuals like Reid, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Ferguson, who rooted contractual ethics in intuitive laws of nature, "a clear apprehension of right and wrong prior to convention" (Ferguson 214). By treating contractual ethics as universal moral laws, they rendered the Gesellschaft in terms that denied its historically constructed and arbitrary structure, and like Common Sense philosophy made the world seem essential, eternal, and inevitable.

Similarly, in the antebellum United States, Perry Miller writes, "metaphysical lawyers" sought to manufacture a "legal sublime" to justify prudence or self-interest.⁵ To do so,

they "allied themselves with the sentimental version of benevolence" (Life 189) which popularized the principles of Scottish moral philosophy in the United States. The "metaphysical lawyers" defended an innate right to property, which, they argued, could not be modified by the Jacksonian majority. Courts of chancery received much of their attention. Chancery, Perry Miller writes, enabled antebellum lawyers to avoid "the tumult of a clownish jury" while vigorously to "expedite the business of a commercial community" (181). Chancery liberated judges to consult their hearts and to sidestep common law restrictions in order to free property from "mechanistic" fetters.

This confluence of religious principles and self-interest underlies the narrator's behavior.⁶ He gives his used coat to Turkey because his elderly employee is an alcoholic who gives the narrator "much ado to keep him from being a reproach to me." The narrator is "willing to overlook his eccentricities" for several reasons: his "appeal to my fellow-feeling was hardly to be resisted. . . . At all events, I saw that go he would not," and because "he was in many ways a most valuable person to me" (637-8). He comically insists on making every benevolent act a useful act.

When Bartleby refuses to copy documents, he forces the narrator to dismiss him on the grounds of self-interest. But the narrator can neither act nakedly on self-interest nor deny the claims of self-interest. He oscillates violently between

prudence and benevolence: "I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man. . . . But I thought it prudent not to break the dismissal at once" (656). He struggles to define benevolence as prudence:

Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle. . . . Mere self-interest . . . should . . . prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy. . . . I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently construing his conduct. (661)

In his confusion, he mixes up the language of appetite and conscience--"Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange wilfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience" (647). However, a little later, "revolving all these things, a prudential feeling" steals over him; at last he perceives that since "such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it" (653). Bartleby's refusal to work exposes the contradiction between benevolence and prudence, which common sense unthinkingly reconciles.

III

Bartleby has from the beginning the perplexing quality of seeming both particular and universal. The narrator would

like to incorporate Bartleby into a conventional tale "at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep," but cannot:

While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature.
(635)

"One of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources," Bartleby is too particular for the narrator's inferential reason: "What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him" (635).

But if Bartleby is too particular, he simultaneously seems to be, by dint of his particularity, an universal scrivener, for the narrator would "waive the biographies of all other scriveners for a few passages in the life of Bartleby." Introducing Bartleby, the narrator insists it "fit I make some mention of myself, my employés, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented" (635). Indeed, so closely identified with the scrivener system is Bartleby, "he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. . . . [H]e wrote on silently, palely, mechanically" (642).

But if Bartleby seems to gorge on documents, he soon comes to violate the narrator's "natural arrangement." Needing copy examined, the narrator, in the "habit . . . of calling Turkey or Nippers," summons Bartleby and assumes the very posture of "common sense."

In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance, I sat with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and somewhat nervously extended with the copy, so that immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business without the least delay. In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him. . . . (643)

By refusing to cooperate, Bartleby plunges the narrator into a crisis that exposes the arbitrary assumptions of his common sense. If, as Reid writes, we instinctively anticipate the fixed and steady course of nature, Bartleby violates it. When Bartleby replies "I would prefer not to," the narrator sits "awhile in perfect silence, rallying [his] stunned faculties" (643) and complaining that the scrivener defies "common usage" and "common sense" (645).

Firmly identified with the system of copying, nevertheless violating all its rules, Bartleby functions as an anomaly, in the sense Kurt Gödel ascribed to a class of statements, simultaneously "true" and "false," generated by axiomatic systems.⁷ Such statements jeopardize the system by exposing its arbitrary assumptions, in this case, those of

common sense.

IV

To finally rid himself of Bartleby, the narrator devises a "doctrine of assumptions" (660); he assumes a "ground" for Bartleby's behavior:

I could not but highly plume myself on my masterly management in getting rid of Bartleby. . . . Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart--as an inferior genius might have done--I assumed the ground that depart he must; and upon that assumption built all I had to say. The more I thought over my procedure, the more I was charmed with it. (658)

In the morning however, the narrator has second thoughts, realizing that his "procedure seemed as sagacious as ever,--but only in theory. . . . The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions" (658-9). In fact, Bartleby has not vacated the offices as requested; he violates the laws of probability.

Probability, said French mathematician Pierre Laplace, was "good sense reduced to a calculus" (qtd. in Daston 50).⁸ In the nineteenth century, the older Enlightenment theory of probability gave way to a new theory that sought to account for behavior in mass society, no longer focused on individual choices, but on statistical averages.⁹ As the focus of

probability shifted "from individual belief and decision making to statistical compilations and distributions for society as a whole" (Daston 371), a fascination with gambling problems emerged because these "squared with a purely objective interpretation of probability" (Daston 372). Interestingly, then, the narrator, as he "walked down town, arguing the probabilities pro and con," passes

an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

"I'll take odds he doesn't," said a voice as I passed.

"Doesn't go?--done! said I, "put up your money."

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. (659)

The narrator's confusion suggests the shift in mass society from individual probabilities to statistical distributions, represented by the reduction of politics to a gambling problem.

In mass society, the "reasonable" citizen gives way to the statistically average l'homme moyen, the "social man" who is, writes Lambert Quetelet, the great French statistician,

a fictitious being, for whom every thing proceeds conformably to the medium results obtained for society in general. It is this being whom we must consider in

establishing the basis of social physics,
 throwing out of view peculiar or
 anomalous cases. (8)

Bartleby is Quetelet's "fictitious being," the representative figure of the system of copying, the "basis of social physics," a being without qualities.¹⁰ But Melville contradicts Quetelet's assumption that such a being excludes the anomalous, for according to the logic of Gödel's theorem, the most representative figure of mass society--the man without qualities--is simultaneously the most anomalous case of all: ultimately, Bartleby refers to the entropic demise of the entire system.

V

The practice of describing social life in terms of energy dynamics dates to Epicurus' ethic of prudence or self-interest, whose goal is satiation, the mitigation of tension. The narrator reconciles benevolence and prudence because that is the "easiest way of life." He is devoted to equilibrium,

a man who, from his youth upwards, has
 been filled with a profound conviction
 that the easiest way of life is the best.
 Hence, though I belong to a profession
 proverbially energetic and nervous, even
 to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of
 that sort have I ever suffered to invade
 my peace. (635-6)

His habit of measuring quantities of energy against quantities

of value reflects the system of his office. Turkey, a shabby alcoholic, returns from lunch with "a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him" and is "altogether too energetic" to do any work. Before lunch, however, he remains a deferential and picturesque employee and thus a valuable person. A second employee, Nippers, is "irritable" and "nervous" in the morning--"sensational" when Turkey is "sentimental"--and "comparatively mild" in the afternoon--"sentimental" when Turkey is drunk or "sensational." By arranging the inverted polarities of his employees, the narrator fashions a revolving engine, a repeating machine for the copying of law documents: "Their fits relieved . . . each other like guards. When Nippers' was on, Turkey's was off and vice versa. This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances" (640-41).

In contrast to this productive, "natural arrangement," Bartleby has a vaporous quality--the narrator at one point wonders if he might "walk straight against him as if he were air" (660). Ultimately, the "competitive industrial system" represented by the arrangement of Turkey and Nippers is, Brook Adams writes, a "solvent" producing "vapor"; it "loses . . . energy in proportion to the perfection of its expansion" (109). In effect, Adams, following his brother Henry, translates Gödel's logic into energy dynamics, inasmuch as the "perfection" of the system is simultaneously its undoing, producing not the anticipated equilibrium, but a vapor. As

the vaporous l'homme moyen, then, Bartleby represents both the perfection of mass society and its entropic annihilation.¹¹

VI

In this way, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" richly anticipates Henry Adams' "dynamic theory of history." In The Degradation of Democratic Dogma, Adams, melding Comte's periodization of history with Willard Gibb's theory of "shifts of phase" in heated materials, translated the critique of mass society into energy dynamics. Grasping the first and second laws of thermodynamics as social and historical, he distinguished between common sense, fixated on the first law, the conservation of energy, and the true import of physics, rendered by the second law, the dissipation of energy. If the former hailed the appearance of equilibrium in society as a sign of progressive complexity, the latter meant that the appearance of equilibrium was really an inverted index to the growing chaos and ultimate nothingness of the system. Thus Adams forecast the ineluctable heat death of mass society.

Adams considered the first law of thermodynamics, conservation of energy, a powerful metaphysical construct: "Directly succeeding the theological scheme of a universe existing as a unity by the will of an infinite and eternal Creator, it affirmed or assumed the unity and indestructibility of Force of Energy, as a scientific dogma or Law" (140). Upon this foundation, nineteenth-century

rationalists attested with growing confidence to a universe "totally accessible to man's intellect and utterly beautiful in its rational intricacy" (Ronald Martin xiv). If force, through successive transformations, can never be destroyed, then the increasing complexity of industrial society represented not the dissipation of natural force, but the development of natural forces toward a new, stable, "higher" equilibrium. The law of the conservation of force seemed to confirm what Adams termed the "silent, half-conscious, intuitive faith of society. . . in a future equilibrium of some sort, that should end in becoming stable" (247).

Unfortunately, the first law of thermodynamics, represented by the narrator's "profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best," was supplanted by the cruelly ironic second law. "Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, . . a new school of physicists appeared in Europe," taking its cue from Sadi Carnot, who in 1824

announced a second law of dynamics. The first law said that Energy was never lost; the second said that it was never saved; that . . . the higher powers of energy tended always to fall lower, and that this process had no known limit. (141)

For Adams, the second law "tossed the universe into the ash-heap" (142). Nevertheless, the "silent, half-conscious, intuitive faith of society"--in other words, common sense--

persists in assuming a "future equilibrium of some sort, that should end in becoming stable." Common sense is, as always, deceived, for "if one physical law exists more absolute than another, it is the law that stable equilibrium is death" (247-8).¹² Common sense fastens on appearances, the "impression of Order," which is, in fact,

an illusion consequent on the dissolution of the higher Order which had supplied, by lowering its inequalities, all the useful energies that caused progress. The reality behind the illusion is, therefore, absence of the power to do useful work,--or . . . death. (256-57)

Like Adams, Melville renders the fictive quality of mass society as energy dynamics, in which the appearance of greater order is really an index to the dissipation of energies and the ultimate nothingness of the system. The narrator of "Bartleby" is fixated on the "impression of Order"; Bartleby contrastingly manifests the "absence of the power to do useful work," the ultimate paradox of the narrator's common sense.

VII

Confronted by Bartleby's entropy, the narrator struggles to reconstitute common sense. He strives again to attribute objectivity to his ideas, to reconcile benevolence and prudence, to envision a "future equilibrium of some sort, that should end in becoming stable," and to incorporate Bartleby in

a sentimental narrative of the kind that formed the mass public.

"Crowded" by public opinion, by the "constant friction of illiberal minds," he acts finally to resolve the crisis: "I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms" (662). As his "friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition" in his room, a "great change" is wrought in him; he gathers all his faculties together to rid himself "of this intolerable incubus" (663).

He thinks to have Bartleby arrested. But Bartleby is as anomalous to the legal system as to the scrivener system:

It is because he will not be a vagrant .
 . . that you seek to count him as a
 vagrant. That is too absurd. No visible
 means of support; there I have him.
 Wrong again: for indubitably he does
 support himself, and that is the only
 unanswerable proof that any man can show
 of his possessing the means so to do.
 (664)

Since the narrator can not decide upon a course of action, he simply removes to new offices; he abandons Bartleby to the public in the form of the other lawyers from the building, who upon encountering the entropic figure's resistance to common sense, threaten to revert to a "mob" (666). Ultimately, they

consign Bartleby to jail.

Jail makes literal the "imaginary and mechanical" structure of the Gesellschaft. Its walls, like those of the narrator's office, manifest the mechanical side of modernity; within them, narratives and meanings circulate freely, facilitated by Mr. Cutlets, a "meat-like" grub-man, whose conversation reflects the conciliation of sentimentalism and sensationalism to which the narrator aspires in his "natural arrangement" of Turkey and Nippers. Mr. Cutlets--his name alludes to the "pleasures of the stomach"--first invokes prudence in the form of bribery: "'Such gentlemen as have friends here, hire me to provide them with something good to eat.'" "'Well then,'" says the narrator, "slipping some silver into the grub-man's hands. . . . 'I want you to give particular attention to my friend there; let him have the best dinner you can get. And you must be as polite to him as possible'" (669-70). In the jail, politeness is the fiction that Tönnies describes, the pretence of benevolence on behalf of self-interest.

At the same time, Mr. Cutlets associates Bartleby with a sentimental account of Monroe Edwards, a forger recently in the papers:

"I thought that friend of yours was a gentleman forger; they are always pale and genteel-like, them forgers. I can't help pity 'em--can't help it, sir. Did you know Monroe Edwards?" he added touchingly, and paused. Then, laying his

hand pityingly on my shoulder, sighed,
 "he died of consumption at Sing-Sing. So
 you weren't acquainted with Monroe?"
 (670)

Bartleby is not a forger but the association suggests a truth: like Bartleby, the forger, by passing off copies as originals, exposes the creative power of copying, unpercieved by common sense. The forger, moreover, passes himself off as a sentimental gentleman, demonstrating the relative autonomy of appearances, the ability of the "arbitrary will" to construct its public display to maximize utility, the force in society of copying.

The newspapers, however, afford the paradoxes of the forger a sentimental resolution, of the kind that the narrator seeks for Bartleby. Mr. Cutlets' touchingly sentimental reaction to this mass cultural narrative indicates a displacement of sociality, in which celebrities are of greater moment than immediate relations. Bartleby's demise shows that this displacement ultimately is entropic, for the creative power of copying depends upon the exhaustion of the original social energies of the Gemeinschaft, which are diverted to the symbolic communications of the Gesellschaft.

To repress the truth of entropy, the narrator offers a metaphysical account of circulation. He would have Bartleby look beyond the prison walls--"there is the sky"--and in their cracks--"here is the grass." The narrator asserts the conservation of energy in which there is no depletion of the

original but an endless cycle of renewal: "A soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung" (671). But Bartleby negates the metaphysics of equilibrium; not eating, he dies emitting a final spasm of energy: "Something prompted me to touch him," says the narrator, "I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet" (671).

VIII

"Bartleby, the Scrivener" does not end with Bartleby's demise, for the narrator relates a "vague report" with "a certain strange suggestive interest." The interest of the report arises from the prospect of reconstructing common sense by showing that Bartleby was not the anomaly he had seemed--an effect from which no cause can be inferred--reasserting the "fixed and steady course of nature," and reforming the narrator's intellectual equilibrium.

Like common sense in general, the narrator first transfers to the world qualities of his mind:

The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumor, hardly can I express the emotions which seize me. (671-72)

Or course, the narrator, not Bartleby, had been suddenly removed (from Chancery) by a change in the administration; strikingly, the narrator's thinking begins with this transfer to the world of his intimately associated ideas, which then impress him with all the force of truth. He continues: "Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men?" Again, he transfers to the world a purely arbitrary association--of sounds--in his mind:

Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cartload they are annually burned. . . . On errands of life, these letters speed to death.
(672)

The narrator reconstructs a seemingly rational sequence of cause and effect from the Dead Letter Office to Bartleby; this seems to reconfigure the regular course of nature since Bartleby is no longer an uncaused effect. The narrator resurrects the archaic theory of causality as the transfer of essence: Bartleby, essentially "prone to a pallid hopelessness," is moved to his demise by the essentially morbid business of handling "dead letters." By casting Bartleby, in spite of his physical demise, as an imperishable quality, an essence, the narrator evades the logic of entropy.

But the "vague report" also recapitulates the logic of

Bartleby's entropy. Mass communications, represented here by the Post Office, which mediates social relations--the postal communication clearly predicated on the absence of the person--appears to be an expanse of communications and relations, a progressive complexity. In fact, it is a depletion of communications and relations. The Dead Letter Office, where letters "on errands of life . . . speed to death," is thus the entropic principle of mass communications, which figures forth in an ultimate form the absence of sociality in the Gesellschaft. Emerging from the Dead Letter Office, Bartleby represents both the perfection of mass society and its ultimate nothingness, its entropic extinction.

Notes

1. In Mass Society, Giner writes of Tarde's theory:

The homogenization of culture through the press also allows other phenomena to arise, the foremost of which is mass manipulation on an unprecedented scale. . . . The factor that makes this possible is the vulnerability of individual minds to the new conditions in a public. In it each member of the vastly spread and fragmented multitude uncritically receives and internalizes the version of reality that the newspapers prepare for him, enhanced by the fetishism that printed matter often inspires. . . . An era of masses without gatherings (always somewhat dangerous for their leaders) emerges by sole virtue of the wide spread of literacy combined with the daily press. (60)

Thus Tarde linked "an analysis of mass culture to its medium of diffusion, and both to the problems of political manipulation and covert influences in modern times" (60).

2. In The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction, Martin quotes typical rhetoric from a review from the North American Review of January, 1818:

While . . . these speculations of false philosophy are wrapped in metaphysical subtleties, they may excite little alarm, and serve rather to amuse the learned; they are those eccentric lightnings, that play harmlessly in the evening cloud; but when they are made the maxims of common life, or, embodied in popular fiction find their way into the hearts of men, they are these same lightnings concentrated and brought down to earth, blasting and consuming. (46)

3. In their introduction to Reid's Inquiry and Essays, Keith Lehrer and Ronald E. Beanblossom write that "Cousin . . . use[d] his position as minister of public instruction to make Reid's common sense philosophy standard material in the French schools" (xlii). They also stress that "Reid's influence in American philosophy has also been great" (xlvii), especially among college presidents.

4. Reid adroitly inverted the skeptical argument: if a "sensation of touch suggests hardness, although it hath neither similitude to hardness, nor, as far as we can perceive, any necessary connexion with it," then Reid sees "nothing left, but to conclude, that, by

an original principle of our constitution, a certain sensation of touch both suggests to the mind the conception of hardness, and creates the belief of it; or, in other words, that this sensation is a natural sign of hardness" ("Principles" 157). Precisely because we cannot infer a quality of an object from the sensation it produces, Reid concludes that the sensation is a "natural sign" of that quality.

According to Reid, confidence in appearances is providentially guaranteed:

The wise Author of our nature intended that a great and necessary part of our knowledge should be derived from experience before we are capable of reasoning, and he hath provided means perfectly adequate to this intention. For, First, He governs nature by fixed laws, so that we find innumerable connections of things which continue from age to age. Without this stability of the course of nature there could be no experience; or it would be a false guide and lead us into error and mischief. . . . Secondly, He hath implanted in human minds an original principle by which we believe and expect the continuance of the course of nature. . . . (Inquiry and Essays 98-99)

5. In The Life of the Mind in America, Miller writes that the "metaphysical lawyers," seeking, like the revivalists, "to avert the horrors of anarchy . . . not by police, parties, or ballots, 'but by bringing home to the minds and hearts of the people, the indisputable principles, the clear and simple truths, on which the rights of property rest'" (qtd. in Life 226), dropped the "notion that property rights derived from the Lockean social compact" and argued that the right to property "is universal, and is suggested to the mind of man by reason and nature, prior to all civil institutions" (Samuel Chipman qtd. in Life 224). They affirmed that

the absolute right of property was prior to the Constitution of the United States, to the constitutions of the states, to all enumerated bills of rights, to Jefferson's dangerous verbiage, but above all prior to and supreme over any of the political trickeries associated with the name of Andrew Jackson. (224)

The "metaphysical lawyers" appropriated the rhetoric of "indwelling" values "graven on every breast"; now, property rights are "written upon the hearts of mankind" by "nature herself" (Chipman qtd. in Life 224). In retrospect, says Miller, it was "a

masterful subtlety. For the idea of benevolence . . . always carries an implication of doing good for one's fellow men," precisely not the intention (189).

6. The reconciliation of prudence and benevolence arises in the aftermath of the Jacksonian crisis. The Founders had forthrightly acknowledged the conflict in American civilization between Christian self-sacrifice and the naturalist ethic of "prudence." Introducing his brother Henry's The Degradation of Democratic Dogma, Brook Adams shows that Adams's generation, rationalist heirs to the Enlightenment, assumed that

in every civilization there are, as Saint Paul pointed out, two principles in conflict,--the law, or the moral principle, and the flesh, or the evil principle; and the flesh is, in a general way, incarnated in the principle of competition, which, rooted in the passions of greed, avarice and cruelty, is apt to prevail to an unendurable degree unless restrained by law. (105)

Capitalism itself incarnates the "evil principle." To mitigate the conflict between religiosity and greed, the founders conceived

an elaborate theory of how a diffused community might be built up into a consolidated and efficient unity; and, stated concisely, his theory amounted to this, comprising both material and intellectual concentration. The first requisite was to suppress competition among the parts, that, to keep order; and, to keep order, there must be a centre of energy whose will must dominate. (105)

To this end, they placed the presidency at the figurative center of the "collective brain" and set Washington, the capitol, at the "convergence of the main highways or arteries of commerce," to collect "material energy . . . at the heart of the organism." The Founders solved the conflict between the "moral principle" and the "evil principle," or benevolence and prudence, by designing a Newtonian republic (See Michael Foly, Laws, Men and Machines: Modern American Government and the Appeal of Newtonian Mechanics), in effect, a dynamo-metamorphic engine to convert evil into good, self-interest into public benefit, prudence into benevolence.

In their calculations, the Founders assumed "a benign and omnipotent Creator of the world, who watches over the fate of men." This being "thinks according to certain fixed laws, which we call scientific laws. . . . [T]hese laws may be discovered by human intelligence and when discovered may be adopted to human uses" (30). However, it turns out that John Quincy Adams "had utterly

mistaken the probable sequence of cause and effect" (77). For Eli Whitney's cotton gin put God's fixed laws to human uses and turned "Virginia into an enormous slave-breeding farm . . . and thus inexorably induced the Civil War" (31). And then "God," the elder Adams concluded, "abandoned him and . . . made Jackson triumph," the very "materialization of the principle of evil. . . . of public plunder" (77).

Many years later, in The Degradation of Democratic Dogma, Henry Adams translates his grandfather's defeat into a "dynamic theory of history," for, writes Brooks

nothing in later human experience could fit more exactly into Henry's theory of the degradation of energy than this picture of the fall of the Adams administration of 1828, because we have so exact a standard of comparison by which to measure it. When the constitution had been adopted and the first administration organized, General Washington's personality had been so commanding that he had released, as it were, the whole nation to his own level, by a sort of miracle of inherent strength; but after General Washington dies, the democratic system of averages began its work, and the old inequality sank to a common level. By 1828, a level of degradation had been reached, and it was the level of Jackson. (83-4)

7. For an argument against such loose allusions to Gödel's incompleteness theorem, see David Wayne Thomas, "Gödel's Theorem and Postmodern Theory."

8. To define rational behavior and reasonable expectations in an uncertain marketplace, the mathematicians provided prudence with a "method": the classic theory of probability. See Lorraine Daston, Classical Probability in the Enlightenment.

9. Also see Mark Seltzer's Bodies and Machines for a discussion of "Statistical Persons."

10. Rogin writes similarly that "Bartleby's absence of qualities . . . place[s] him historically. Bartleby inhabits the mass society that Tocqueville feared would triumph in America if meaningful, free, political action decayed" (194).

11. On Bartleby and entropy, see Zbigniew Lewicki, The Bang and the Whimper.

12. Adams cites M. Bernhard Brunhes's Degradation published by Gustave Le Bon: on the one hand, "physical science presents to us a world which is unceasingly wearing itself out"; on the other

hand,

another philosophy paints complacently, on the contrary, a world steadily improving. . . . On one side, therefore, the world wears out; on another side the appearance on earth of living beings more and more elevated, and,--in a slightly different order of ideas,--the development of civilization in human society, undoubtedly give the impression of a progress and a gain. (255-6)

Afterward

I

If by way of conclusion we examine the diptych "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," we see Melville return to the themes of common sense and energy; indeed, the two-part structure of the story admirably highlights the contrast between conventional social consciousness wedded to surfaces and the underlying entropic extraction of social energy. By linking the two realms, Melville indicates that the task of the modern writer is to confront common sense with its real underpinnings.

The Enlightenment made close allies of philosophy and energy; the nineteenth century understood society as, in Stephen Greenblatt's phrase, "the circulation of social energy."¹ Indeed, the very concept of energy is social, for it arises, as Philip Mirowski argues in his extraordinary More Heat than Light: Economics as Social Physics, in a specific "economic milieu." The concept of energy, writes Mirowski, translates into physics "a common context of evaluation . . . a system of accounts for keeping track of completed or useful action" (106).² There is, for example, a resemblance between "Carnot's conceptualization of the output of the heat engine" and the "Tableau Economique of the eighteenth century French physiocrat François Quesnay." In each case, a single substance--value or energy--is transferred among various sectors of the system without loss or gain; in each case,

equilibrium is achieved through the "reconstitution" of the original substance (126). We can trace a similar "reconstitution" of "heat" and "value" in "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids."

That the Templars of "The Paradise of Bachelors" are lawyers signifies that the higher, heroic energies of the original, self-sacrificing Christian crusaders have degraded to the level of the paradoxical sociality of the Gesellschaft which Tönnies identified with contractualism. The contract reformulates the social bond as mutual self-interest and the lawyers are the representative figures of the new contractualism, guided by the Epicurean ideal of prudence, the pursuit of self-interest. If Epicurus affirmed that "the beginning and the root of all good is the pleasure of the stomach," the contemporary "Knights Templars," if romantically named, have been in fact "so entirely secularized as to be reduced from carving out immortal fame in glorious battling for the Holy Land, to the carving of roast-mutton at a dinner-board" (1258).

The lawyers esteem oral gratification over sexual, equilibrium over activity. Their sociality is formed from the displacement of biological energy to fictive relations. They mask their self-interest with geniality, pretending that everyone is there for the pleasure of the others rather than for their mutual self-gratification. Thus while the narrator extols their exemplary geniality--their warmth--he indicates

its utter superficiality, since it is fueled by alcohol:

It seemed held something indelicate, selfish, and unfraternal, to be seen taking a lonely, unparticipated glass. Meantime, as the wine ran apace, the spirits of the company grew more and more to perfect genialness and unconstraint. They related all sorts of pleasant stories. (1263)

Moreover, the lawyers are oblivious to the infrastructure of their sociality, "The Tartarus of Maids," for the paper mill produces the paper on which the contracts--"sermons, lawyers' briefs, physicians' prescriptions, love-letters, marriage certificates, bills of divorce, registers of births, death-warrants, and so on, without end" (1276)--are written.³ The imagery of paper suggests that in modernity, life unfolds on paper, that abstract relations have replaced face-to-face ones. Thus the errand that brings the narrator to the mill is a consequence of a huge increase in his seed business, which outgrows its former boundaries:

The demand for paper at my place became so great that the expenditure soon amounted to a most important item in the general account. It needs hardly be hinted how paper comes into use with seedsman, as envelopes. These are mostly made of yellowish paper, folded square; and when filled, are all but flat, and being stamped, and superscribed with the nature of the seeds contained, assumed not a little the appearance of business-letters ready for the mail. Of these small envelopes I used an incredible

quantity--several hundreds of thousands
in a year. (1267)

As in "Bartleby, the Scrivener," the postal system serves as a metaphor for the substitution in the Gesellschaft of mediated relations for direct relations.

Entering the paper mill, the narrator confronts the mechanical core of modernity, which makes the female operatives appendages of the machine. He sees that the maids in their blankness resemble the paper they are making: "At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper" (1270). This in turn reminds him of "that celebrated comparison of John Locke, who, in demonstration of his theory that man had no innate ideas, compared the human mind at birth to a sheet of blank paper; something destined to be scribbled on" (1276-7). Locke's tabula rasa reduced mind to a mechanistic appendage; the machines of industrialism subject the maids in some ultimate way to repetition, which the narrator calls "metallic necessity" (1277), the "unvarying punctuality and precision" of the machine (1276).

Unlike the lawyers, the narrator takes note of the connection between "The Tartarus of Maids" and "The Paradise of Bachelors," in spite of their overt dissimilarity:

Something latent, as well as something

obvious in the time and scene, strangely brought to my mind my first sight of dark and grimy Temple-Bar. . . . Though the two objects did by no means completely correspond, yet this partial inadequacy but served to tinge the similitude not less with the vividness than the disorder of a dream. . . . I said to myself, "This is the very counterpart of the Paradise of Bachelors, but snowed upon, and frost-painted to a sepulchre." (1268-9)

This perception so exceeds common sense that it has a dream-like quality. In contrast, the narrator's guide, Cupid, conspicuously unaware of the connections the narrator notices, represents common sense: "More tragical and more inscrutably mysterious than any mystic sight, human or machine, throughout the factory, was the strange innocence of cruel-heartedness in this usage-hardened boy" (1274).

For Cupid, "the enormous revolutions of the dark colossal water-wheel, grim with its one immutable purpose," are normal and inevitable. For the narrator, the mill that Cupid matter-of-factly describes is a circulatory system that diverts energy from the maids to the bachelors. Thus when the narrator asks Cupid if the mill produces only blank paper, the latter looks at him as if "suspicious of [his] common sense":

"Certainly; what else should a paper-factory make?" . . .

"Oh, to be sure!" said I, confused and stammering; "it only struck me as so strange that red waters should turn out pale chee--paper, I mean." (1272)

Common sense cannot perceive that the "red waters," as the narrator implies, have been drained from the maids and converted to paper, the basis of the contractual Gesellschaft, whose wealth the lawyers consume to fuel their pseudo-sociality.

Cupid remarks that the oddly named "Blood River" sets the "whole machinery agoing." The narrator had earlier observed this "brick-colored stream" on his approach to the mill, described in persistent vaginal imagery:

[T]he sudden contraction of the gorge . . . is called the Black Notch. The ravine now expandingly descends into a great, purple, hopper-shaped hollow, far sunk among many Plutonian, shaggy-wooded mountains. By the country people this hollow is called the Devil's Dungeon. Sounds of torrents fall on all sides upon the ear. These rapid waters unite at last in on turbid brick-colored stream, boiling through a flume among enormous boulders. They call this strange-colored torrent Blood River. (1266)

Because the mill is a dynamo-metamorphic engine which changes the female life force from one mode of work to another, it entails a mechanistic parody of sexual reproduction, indicated by the proliferation of sexual and gestational metaphors: the "rude tower--for hoisting heavy boxes" standing in the "deep-cloven passages" of the mountain (1269), the "iron animal . . . of ponderous iron, with a vertical thing like a piston periodically rising and falling" (1270). In the "strange,

blood like, abdominal heat" the "germinious particles" of paper are "finally developed" (1274); nine minutes later, he hears the "scissory sound . . . as of some cord being snapped" (1275).

The vaginal imagery of Blood River forms the counterpoint to the asexual orality of the lawyers, who will ultimately consume through their mouths the diverted force or energy of Blood River which "sets the whole machinery agoing." "Blood River" alludes to the very prototype of a circulatory system, the blood system; the diptych, like a tableau economique, traces the circulation of heat, or energy, or value. From the lawyers' perspective, the value that they consume is "reconstituted" without loss or gain; in contrast, the narrator observes the original loss--the energy diverted from the maids--obscured by the lawyers' expectation of equilibrium, their common sense.

II

"The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids" renders a vision of mass society to which Melville will adhere through his final work, Billy Budd. "Bartleby" shows that the ultimate tendency of such a society is entropic, that the social energy diverted to appearances is wasted. In Billy Budd, the execution of Budd represents the entropic extinction of the original sociality, a sign of the ultimate nothingness of mass society.

In Billy Budd, Melville restages the logic of his career: the transition from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft, and from the crowd to the public. Budd alludes to the "noble savages" of Typee, who embodied all the original virtue of the Gemeinschaft. He adheres to the naive realism of the Gemeinschaft; he does not distinguish between ideas and objects and takes the world as it purports to be. His confidence in appearances proves fatal, for he falls prey to the manipulation of appearances by Claggart, who recalls Ahab's dexterous crowd psychology. Claggart gives way to Captain Vere, who articulates the common sense of the public. Justifying his decision to execute Budd, Vere frankly attests to the "imaginary and mechanical" structure of the Gesellschaft--the pitiless quality of the navel code, which, he insists, looks only to "the frontage, the appearance" (1416). If Budd's "intent or nonintent is nothing to the purpose" (1416), it is because substantial sociality no longer exists; Budd, the original human, is sacrificed to sanctify the order of appearances, to found the psychological polity of modernity.

Afterward, Budd's demise circulates in mass culture. The official "News from the Mediterranean" untruthfully portrays Budd as a conspirator and Claggart as an innocent; simultaneously, a melancholy sailor's ballad alludes to the unhappiness of Budd's death. Billy Budd--and Melville's career--end with the official version of the story juxtaposed

to the partial expression of discontent in the context of a sentimental resolution, a dualism representative of mass culture.

Melville's vision of a society dominated by mass culture both predates our "postmodernity" and differs from it in many particulars. In their breadth and density, Melville's fictions show that our idea of modernity is incomplete; they remind us of a whole corpus of concepts and practices--the contrast between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, the passage from crowd psychology to social psychology, the social unconscious, the leader, the mass cultural practices of mesmerism, alcoholism, and revivalism, the impact of electricity and thermodynamics, the common sense of the public, and so on--which no longer influence our thinking but which strongly affected the nineteenth-century concept of modernity. We ignore these things at the risk of projecting our ideas onto the nineteenth century; we thereby miss an opportunity to expand our understanding of modernity, too often restricted to a few well-rehearsed themes.

Notes

1. Greenblatt, in Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England, cannot easily define "social energy" but this obscurity serves his purpose: to trace the course of a range of cultural "negotiations." He wants to know "how cultural objects, expressions, and practices . . . acquired compelling force" (5). He instructs us that "English literary theorists . . . drawing on the Greek rhetorical tradition" invoked the term "energia" to "describe the ability of language, in Puttenham's phrase, to cause 'a stire to the mind'" (5). Twice he asks "But what is 'social energy'?"

The term implies something measurable, yet I cannot provide a convenient and reliable formula for isolating a single, stable quantum for examination. We identify energia only indirectly, by its effects: it is manifested in the capacity of certain verbal, aural, and visual traces to produce, shape, and organize collective physical and mental experiences. Hence it is associated with repeatable forms of pleasure and interest, with the capacity to arouse disquiet, pain, fear, the beating of the heart, pity, laughter, tension, relief, wonder. In its aesthetic modes, social energy must have a minimal predictability--enough to make simple repetitions possible--and a minimal range: enough to reach out beyond a single creator or consumer to some community, however constricted. Occasionally, and we are generally interested in these occasions, the predictability and range will be far greater: large numbers of men and women of different social classes and divergent beliefs will be induced to explode with laughter or weep or experience a complex blend of anxiety and exaltation. (6)

This definition of "social energy" as the force of certain kinds of representations seems to accord with the analysis of mass culture, which also tracks the "circulation of social energy" in culture and politics and measures its effects on the masses. "What then is the social energy that is being circulated?" he asks again, "Power, charisma, sexual excitement, collective dreams, wonder, desire, anxiety, religious awe, free-floating intensities of experience." Again this seems useful; Ahab puts these qualities into circulation in his great crowd scenes.

2. James Prescott Joule, one of the scientists credited with the "discovery" of force conservation, openly inferred this "scientific law" from a metaphysical principle: the "absolute

destruction of living force," he wrote, "cannot possibly take place, because it is manifestly absurd to suppose that the powers with which God has endowed matter can be destroyed any more than that they can be created by man's agency" (qtd. in Ronald Martin 16).

Mirowski argues that the "scientific" concept of energy is scientifically and mathematically unjustifiable. The law of the conservation of energy, he suggests, arises more from the needs of physics as a discipline than from empirical experience. "Energy"--a substance-like entity "conserved" in transitions from one mode of work to another--unifies diverse empirical forces in a single global concept. At the same time, it appears to be an underlying, permanent--metaphysical--stratum of reality against which change is to be measured. Disputing Thomas Kuhn, who proposes German Naturphilosophie as the source of the energy-concept, Mirowski argues that "energy" is a metaphoric transfer into physics of the economic concept of value.

3. "The Tartarus of Maids" alludes to the famous industrial experiment at Lowell, Massachusetts. Couching their schemes in the sentimental language of idealist perfectionism, the managers of Lowell, writes John Kasson in Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America 1776-1900, claimed authority over the worker's "private activities and feelings as well" as their "productive performance." The managers, moreover, launched several magazines that "though nominally independent, served in effect as house organs, expressing solidarity between workers and management" (94). These magazines permitted partial expression of discontent in the context of a sentimental resolution. Dissident workers argued that the sentimental rhetoric obscured the worker's enslavement to the machine. Observers declared Lowell the future of American mass society, a utopian version of industrialism.

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