

INSTRUMENTS

THE BLANK OF MIND

My mind draws a blank. How to remember her name? Her scent I can almost smell, her face I can picture (red hair, high cheekbones, sad, green eyes), the way she speaks (accent, intonation, tempo) comes back to me. I recall the last time we met, the restaurant (on High Street?), and how we spoke about Mount Athos. But her name? It is on the tip of my tongue. My lips are ready to form its sound. . . . Nothing comes.

Mnemonics fail to break the grip of amnesia. The blank remains, stalling me. It is a gap, a tangible nothing that in turn creates an amnesia of intention. It is a hole in the seamless wall that holds back chaos. It is a power whose destabilizing effect translates to the constellation of meanings—my world. My mind *is* a blank and I mind only it. Thought and action, stopped in their trajectories, cease to be meaningful continuities. Their geometry disfigured, they fall under the category of zero. Unfinished, incomplete, bearing no marking, vacuous, signifying nothing, empty, devoid of purpose or hope, barren, fruitless. The whole field of signification is under siege. The blank betokens a danger.

A danger? The blank? One would like to believe the blank signifies merely a minor breakdown (like that minimalist notion, the glitch) in the otherwise smooth operation of mind, a hiccup, a slight dysfunctionality, a situational abnormality, a bug in the works. Loss would be confined to a few bytes and order easily restored. Such is the dismissive attitude of a cool hour when the blank has been neutered, reified, conceptualized, reduced to a colorless, secondary role in discourse. Why make a scene of not remembering a name?

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In the heat of the event (Damn, I remember she was a friend of Harry's and liked reading May Sarton), knowledge is fundamentally constrained. Surprisingly, Locke is first aware of the fundamental difficulty. In an important section of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* entitled "Of Retention," he alludes to the blank's deep threat to intellect. The section deals with memory, essentially an act of interior gazing—of "viewing again." Once an idea has been "fixed" by attention and repetition, the "eye of the soul" is able to locate it in its field of vision. Gazing has its vulnerabilities, affection for instance. Emotional disturbance suddenly frees a memory or alternatively eclipses a clear reminiscence. Vulnerability in turn heralds two further aspects, each more fundamental than the former: gazing's teleology—to rouse "dormant ideas"—and its economy, retention. The last is the particular concern of the present chapter.

What is more threatening to a secret than exposure? Fear of coming out of closet or cave is a primal fear. Thus the blank's danger to Locke's deepest and most secret discovery—the *tentive* character of mind. It is a secret discovery because, never explicitly stated, tentivity is expressed in each of Locke's positions: a representational theory of meaning, principles of abstraction and induction, and a dispositional theory of ethics. It is the invisible hub around which these satellites turn, at the same time invisibly and eternally banishing its sole rival, recollection. It forms the deepest stratum because tentivity is his answer to one of the most ancient of problems. The question was already old when Aristotle asked it again: "why should the perception of the mere present impression be memory of something else, instead of being related to this impression alone?"¹ The question related to that of time: how does knowledge of the past arise when that which we know directly through experience is in the present? Aristotle in fact prefaces his remarks in *On Memory and Reminiscence* by listing the sole philosophical alternatives. He says that

the persons who possess a retentive memory are not identical with those who excel in power of recollecting; indeed as a rule slow people have a good memory whereas those who are quick-witted and clever are better at recollecting.²

To grasp, grip, seize, hold, clutch, keep, secure, or retain describes *the* basic intellectual act of preservation. It is that through which the nonpresent, the absent, comes to be known. Preservation also has an obverse. Because of intellect's grasping, we cease to be available to the solicitation of the present. Tentivity is the cloak of concealment under which lurks the ultimate untenability of the position.

Locke's grand discovery of the retentive may have precipitated from the prevailing *episteme* like a crystal from a saturated solution. If to grope for origins by use of analysis and recombination of simple elements (for Locke, simple ideas) facilitates his discovery, the method also obscures its grandure. Retention is listed merely as a faculty of mind, a faculty among faculties—not, as it is, *the* faculty of faculties. In fact, retention organizes the whole economy of mind in such a way that, where it is not active, intellectual transaction and exchange, as we know it, grind to a stop. This fact does not emerge until a breakdown situation, when memory fails. "Memory in an intellectual creature," Locke says, "where it is wanting, all the rest of our faculties are in a great measure useless."³ Retention becomes wealth, the power to extend beyond the immediately given. The equation is given even greater force in his second *Treatise of Government* where what one removes by one's own labor from what is common to all becomes one's property, the sole basis of wealth.

Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labor with and joined to it something that is his own and thereby makes it his property.⁴

Where retention is poor, when "we in our thoughts, reasoning, and knowledge, could not proceed beyond present objects," poverty results. The lack of intellectual grip signifies an impoverishment of power, estate, quality, and elevation as much as does lack of personal property. That lack supplies all the incentive necessary to drive an economy of retention. What Locke calls "perfect ignorance"—blankness—is to be avoided at all cost lest one lapse into slavery (poverty amongst wealth), dispossession, and presentness.

Recalling the inner dynamics, the infrastructure, of retentive memory, we need to fill a missing gap. An understanding of fear

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of poverty is necessary in order to explain the absolute rigidity attending the gaze—though up to a certain point, fear itself sharpens the wits. Think of it. Economically, it is a given that the gaze functions amidst wild, destabilizing forces. Each threat to blot out memory and displace time from the past—desire, pleasure, emotion, appetite, inapposite thought and imagery—must be overcome by an operation inherently reticent, delicate, meek, and reserved. The gaze, therefore, must be jealously guarded against dulling, stultifying influences that shrink its vital, expanding vision. A variety of controls can be exercised on an idea already in view (contemplation) or on an idea not yet observed but held ready for viewing. The latter (memory proper in Locke's terms) reaches toward an extreme point of vigilance, a hyperextension of vigilance. It must retain contact with potential memories, and even impossible ones that actually did take place. Our appreciation of such a severely channeled concentration grows.

There is more. With guardedness stretched to the limit by threat of blank global paralysis, retentivity is called to yet more drastic measures. They form the secret of Locke's secretness and spawn a host of special economic devices, including domination, subjugation, disfigurement, and marginalization. These techniques are directed toward the least impressive of all targets—the unmemorable, unremarkable, barely noticeable, trivializable, and inconsequential event. How are we to understand this remarkable watchfulness? Like low-flying aircraft, those phenomena that move below our line of vision pose the greatest threat. Unlike hordes of passions, hosts of desires, or armies of pleasure, they attack with no warning. They alone explain why the extensive regime of intellect remains on alert for discontinuity, blankness. Any break in the chain of command may bring instantaneous collapse, catastrophe, defeat, death. Fear of a failed order of things is in the end fear of their mortal ruin.

Conversely, memory as retentive becomes an issue only after an episteme has become aware of threats to intellectual power. No such issue arises until intellect has come to power, as it did during the late Renaissance. Although retention is mentioned in the vast Aristotelean corpus, the Greek mind is not fully identified with the objectifying function of intellect. The decisive turn is taken with objectification of three-dimensional space, as typified in the rediscovery of linear perspective in art. Descartes, an early operator in the shift, transfers the whole human identity to the

function. He does not yet, however, explicitly recognize its axis, choosing only to mention memory, "the practice of retaining the impressions for some time."⁵ It is Locke's genius to perceive that an entirely new form of consciousness is based on retention. Just as a third dimension requires reorganized rules of spatial arrangement, so too object consciousness necessitates massively reorganized rules of exchange of energies within a human being. The new position of the intellectual function requires an increased power supply to execute its newly won authority. At the same time, the novel form of consciousness unmakes the work of that which precedes it. Since to bind up the attention fully in intellectual pursuits is to cease to allow it to be harmoniously disposed to sensitivity and affectivity, a balanced awareness of reality is thereby superseded. Henceforth, consciousness will think its way to existence.

Locke grants only a glimpse of a preretentive condition. Prior to the hegemony of reason is the state of nature,

a state of perfect freedom to order [people's] actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.⁶

In the free economy, rules of exchange are established by relations of harmony. Rather than one aspect of consciousness vying against another for the attention, attentiveness belongs to the whole. Intellect, sensitivity, and affectivity coexist in equilibrium. The state of inner relatedness corresponds to a relatedness among persons. Such relations reflect the dynamics of inner exigence, to remain related in consciousness, to neutralize tendencies to separate, isolate, control, dominate. The state of nature is not, however, without conflict. Conflict in fact is a necessary phase in an equilibrium that moves toward integrity, disclosure, and freedom. The very movement forbids dwelling in conflict since it impedes a harmonious exchange essential to free attentiveness. Conflict exists as a state preceding its own resolution.

Once a tentative principle is established, the older form of consciousness becomes a hypothetical reference point.

Locke adds mythic color to a description of the state of nature but little factuality; for example, "creatures of the same species

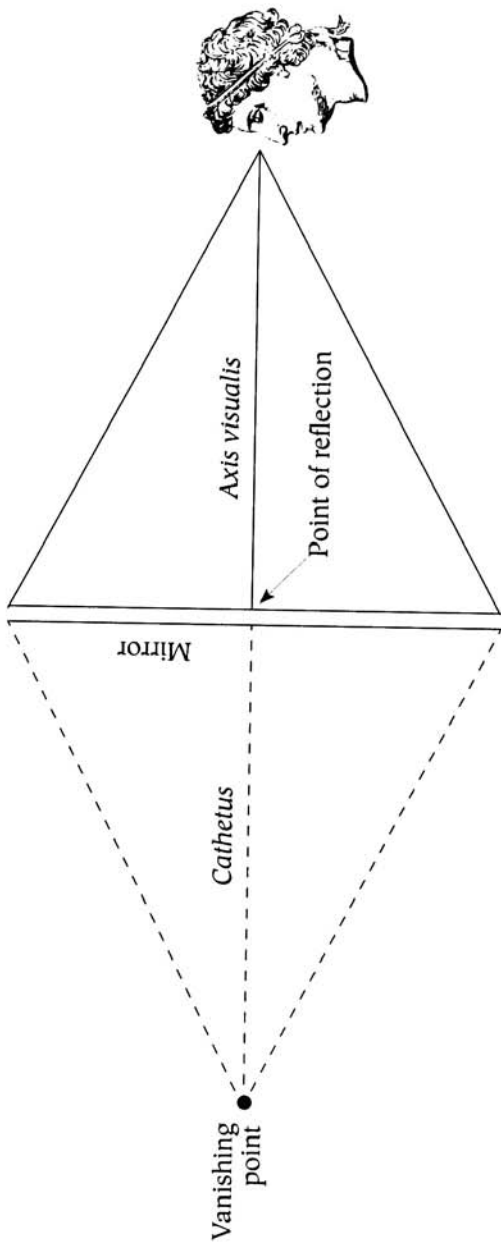


Figure 1

and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature . . . should also be equal one amongst another. . . .”⁷ In his epistemological thought, nothing at all is offered. Both works reveal what happens to consciousness under the gaze of retention. It becomes the vanishing point, the sightless eye that stares blankly back at the viewer—always unseen, yet always, like a black hole, drawing the vision gravitationally to it (figure 1).

Consciousness becomes the point of erasure that is everywhere and nowhere in the field of object consciousness. The point of decomposition, destabilization, displacement, disintegration of the object. The point that is nonisomorphic, that does not translate—the point that cannot be retained.

Because an idea unfolds in nonlinear time, adjacent points of intellectual history may be separated by epoches. So it is no surprise to find the twentieth century yields the next great student of retention and the blank of mind, Freud. In a chapter entitled “Forgetting of Proper Names” in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, he notes the phenomenon of displacement:

he who strives for the escaped name brings to consciousness others—substitute names—which, although immediately recognized as false, nevertheless obtrude themselves with great tenacity.⁸

The misremembered name (a displaced memory) serves supremely to fill in the blank (it obtrudes “with great tenacity”) yet is obviously wrong. (“Mary.” Why the hell do I remember “Mary” when that wasn’t *her* name?) Its line of service can be traced, as Freud does in his own example, to reveal a “method” of avoidance, but not the form of consciousness avoided. The former avoidance strives invariably to conceal *thantos* or *eros*, death or sexuality. One name (the remembered one) covers over a second that has close associations with a forbidden subject. The forbiddenness has to do with the other measure of avoidance. Object consciousness strives mightily to conceal each point at which another consciousness might gain exposure. This striving, to be precise, is its tentivity. Forbiddenness awakens the striving.

Freud’s advance over Locke is in designating the category of the forbidden. The forbidden is of indispensable value in retention since it must always be remembered if it is to be avoided. Its aura attracts the inner gaze the way a disquieting scene does the

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eye. The forbidden must always be resisted, shunned, repelled, annulled, and, therefore, retained in mind.

Freud's well-studied equation of the forbidden with the sexual gives an understanding of the retentive mechanism. The intellect's retentive gaze prevents an undesired spilling of seeds of knowledge.⁹ It guards against profligate uses, retaining the germs to inseminate the understanding at the time of conception. Where ideas seep out, leak away, or are drained in pursuit of pleasure, a kind of will-less quiescence endangers thought. Postcoital *lethe* is the blank, "perfect ignorance," a small defect of intellect—minute, transient, but sufficient to bankrupt the state, rob the mind of its customary form of consciousness, and reinstitute an earlier, nonobjectifying form.

To retain is also to hold back in a continuous act of sacrifice. To suffer loss of pleasure is to offer up semen to a higher good, knowledge. To relinquish the discharge is to appreciate the usefulness of retention since memory empowers knowledge by preventing improper dissemination of thought. Thought is celibacy and asceticism, a positing (not depositing) for the sake of accumulating mental force. Memory is that which cannot be sacrificed. Amnesia, temporary or not, is equivalent to depletion, impotence, flaccidity, detumescence—death in its sexual mode. Memory officiates the sacrifice of the free discharge of thought in order to preserve the species of consciousness it serves.

INNER SPEAKING

The blank places object consciousness on the altar of sacrifice. Who is to officiate? A most promising candidate refuses the role. The dangerous offering is banished beyond limits of intellect and civil society. The blank as erratum with no page number, as renegade with no real name. Visibly, there is no blank place in the field of objects. While the field is everywhere compact, the blank leaves its trace. Locke is thus not capable of total dismissal. Despite his attempt to minimize it, the impress of the blank, incomplete and distorted, can be found in his text on language.

I am in the middle of a sentence, caught up with expression of thought. I come to the place where her name is to go . . . and it is blank! The vast machinery of discursive articulation grinds to a stop. Categorical selection, depth grammar, phonetic nuance, perceptual framing: all are suspended. In the stunning aftermath, the

attention, momentarily freed from compulsive word production, can turn toward the context of discourse. The background of speech becomes audible only in the silence of speech. The background is not silence but, as Locke puts it, "articulate sounds," repeated subvocally. Nor is background accidental, a wayward nuisance or impediment to actual word production. Rather, inner speaking is a condition necessary for outer speaking, speaking plain and simple:

Besides articulate sounds, therefore, it was further necessary that [one] should be able to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions; and to make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's minds be conveyed from one to another.¹⁰

The necessity of inner speech is the same as that of retentive memory. It is a necessity of constant rehearsal, practice and repetition of words—lest the technology fall idle. Idleness equals lethe and chaos; forgetting, losing one's grip, weakness of will. Idleness means slavery (not being able to appropriate property from nature) or the state of nature itself. Articulate sounds repeated subvocally alone immunize against muteness, "perfect ignorance." The force of necessity is measured by the blank and the turbulent wake it leaves. In an important section appropriately entitled, "Of the Imperfection of Words," Locke notes that "for the recording our own thoughts for the help of our own memories, whereby, as it were, we talk to ourselves, any words will serve the turn."¹¹ This is a stellar discovery. Sheer inner repetition of articulate sound serves an end other than that of making sense. Reason has good reason to take pains to conceal the fact; namely, that reasonableness itself is only a secondary property, a byproduct, the audible melody of a great underground cacophony. And that grating and grinding of gears finds its primary purpose in repeated continuation of the form of object consciousness. To perpetuate retentive memory, inner speaking came into being. Not for discourse but to keep engaged, like a flywheel, the mechanism of holding and grasping. Ungrammaticalities, semantic errors, nonsequiturs, and perfect nonsense: linguistic fragments are strung end to end associatively—mixed in with occasional discursive thought—in order that the machinery run full time. The

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essential of language has nothing at all to do with discourse, though discourse pictures it otherwise. Discourse in a way is accidental, a throwaway discovery like Hermes's discovery of the tortoiseshell lyre. To speak of the absolute necessity of inner speech is to speak of that of productivity. Necessity is economic in character. Not to produce is to let the linguistic mechanism come to a stop.

And what would happen, should it stop? Whatsitsname?

The stream of inner speaking, the inner circuit of intellect communicating with itself, necessarily frames "civil" communication, persons speaking to one another. A modicum of focus gains possession of discourse, wrests it from the state of nature, and prepares it for exchange "about the ordinary affairs and conveniences of civil life, in the societies of men, one amongst another."¹² Antecedently, the subterranean babble, though constant and constantly inaudible, is not always the same. Retentivity affects level, density, dissonance, and intensity of inner speech while inner speech is the barometer of retentive pressure, recording fluctuations within a constant range. Receptivity to the inaudible has an opposite effect, penetrating as it were both constancy and necessity. To give ear to inner speech weakens the drive to produce words. At the same time, receptivity grows aware of both an absence of meaning and the cause of absence. The void of meaning is due to lack of an arche name, an I who speaks. No one speaks in inner speech, yet speaking inaudibly goes on. Because an I who speaks is missing from inner speech, it cannot be stopped—unless by an I who speaks.

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Under force of a blank moment, discourse dissolves to inner speech—a misnomer since such speaking lacks the semantic intent of discourse. "Communication of thoughts" is swallowed by obsession with utterance at a point between one word and the next. The new configuration is the same, with variations. Inner speech, like discourse, belongs to the tentative mind, in much the same way practicing scales and arpeggios belongs to the concert performance. The first is necessary to production of the second. One and the same mind is temporarily stunned "as by a gadfly" and brought to attention before its own productive activity, hence is different inasmuch as it experiences itself. Such experience is

still peripheral, eccentric, from the outside, and barely related to anything other than objectification. Yet, the degree to which difference is acknowledged determines how the blank's specific potentiating powers affect knowledge. From within a point between two associative elements, inner speaking too can be tracelessly dissolved. Gradually or suddenly, speech is over. The inaudible monologue ceases to command the field and is swallowed, without a whisper, into the folds of another form of consciousness altogether. The call of the soma has been heard.

Dissolution of one field of consciousness (objectification) and eruption of a second (kinaesthesia). The event of transition, discontinuity, displacement, conversion, and metanoia is radical and complete. Subtle or explosive, it unmakes the impulse to produce meaning—and the whole semantic commentary on that which confronts the mind—and leaves . . . a gap.

The sequence I describe inverts an order endemic to Enlightenment tradition. Customarily, the second field is regarded as a degradation of the first. Degradation, deterioration, decomposition, loss. Conceptual meaning, product of sensory input, is framed within a state of ruin. Thought in any form is ruination. In this vein, Hobbes notices that “imagination therefore is nothing but *decaying sense*,” and lawfully that “the longer the time is after the sight or sense of any object, the weaker the imagination.”¹³ Memory differs from imagination insofar as it takes time into account. The activity, whether memory or imagination, dwells in the contradictory tentative mind: object consciousness tries to grasp by repetition that which is ungraspable in uniqueness. That sensitivity inevitably decomposes to a deficient, desensitized condition speaks to a context of frustration, self-doubt, passivity, and paralysis—echoed in Hobbes's nasty and brutish description of the human condition. The attitudes accurately depict basic operations of the tentative mind: fixation of the attention, rigidification, stagnation, stuckness. It is from the character of these that the Hobbesian subtext arises.

The inversion I speak of is even clearer in Hume, though he lacks the clarity of Locke. A virtue of Hume's thought lies in its concreteness. Take a famous thought experiment of the *Inquiry*. I cite in full:

Suppose therefore a person to have enjoyed his sight for thirty years and to have become perfectly ac-

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quainted with colors of all kinds, except one particular shade of blue, for instance, which it never has been his fortune to meet with; let all the different shades of that color, except that single one, be placed before him, descending gradually from the deepest to the lightest, it is plain that he will perceive a *blank* where that shade is wanting, and will be sensible that there is a greater distance in that place between the contiguous colors than in any other. Now I ask whether it be possible for him, from his own imagination, to supply this deficiency and raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, though it had never been conveyed to him by his senses?¹⁴

Hume's interest is to demonstrate an exception to a basic insight: the absolute exclusiveness of impressions and ideas, "all our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones."¹⁵ The exception occurs when in the midst of the color spectrum, a blank appears, a space between contingencies or continuities. Hume remains unaware of an important subtext in the example and how it reveals his aversion. ["What's this color's name?"] Just like not remembering her name (I almost had it that time), Hume treats the absence as a slip of the mind. Though not a color, it is an almost-color, a spectral hue ("ghostly blue"), a place where color *should be*. It differs from colors on either side of it only by degree. It yields no radical separation since the missing shade can be interpolated, retrieved from memory. It is an equal that happens to be unequal (in acquaintance, in familiarity, in experience), and therefore not an abyss, a schism, an other—the blank. It is no real blank but one neutered, deenergized, and made computational. There is no decompression of the conscious field, no thrust of inversion, no echo of inner speaking, no blankness—nothing to raise the hairs on one's back. Here, the blank is no monster, no Cerebus, but appears in a sanitary, civil edition, expurgated for the tentative mind—a parody of itself. For Hume, the blank exists only in facsimile.

The blank and the inversion of consciousness. Consciousness appears as a higher form and inverts to a lower. Impression decomposes to idea, to thought. A lifelike but lifeless residue is left—one which no one would mistake for life. How to account for thought's inferiority to impressions—for isn't it this that drives

Hume to backgammon, skepticism, and despair? We need to read the subtext of the *Inquiry* deliberations. It is clear that awareness activated with an impression is more elevated, intense, and data rich because it is unproductive. Productivity, while essential to knowledge, is essentially a depletion, dissipation, and dispersal of energy. In itself, an impression can produce nothing. Evanescent, transient, ephemeral, it is an unimpeded energy complex, undisrupted movement, trace of a hidden signature, sign of an undeciphered symbol. Disrupted, it is no longer but in its place, another that is useful to know. The proto idea appears in the vapor trails of the impression. These mark, not consciousness of impressions, but death of that consciousness, its disintegration and loss of wholeness. That which is produced from the life of an impression is other than life, its Gorgon face, frozen in expression—enter, the representation.

Intellect arises in the privation I speak of. Object consciousness is directed toward replenishing an absent plenitude. It must forever erase the memory of that which it replaces. Production of objects of knowledge must, however, expend more—force, vitality, movement—than it yields. The end result takes the shape of an ignorance, if ignorance is that which chooses the lesser over the greater. It opts for scarcity over abundance. Uneconomical or antieconomical, the shift *ab initio* is to a losing concern. In defiance of free interchange, protectionist policies come into force. Boundaries are established, rules of commerce enforced, isolation established. These measures rigidify a plastic, dynamic condition, marked with vigor and vitality of exchange, in order to safeguard knowledge production. Like a law of self-evidence, the logic of productivity becomes inescapable. In the final stage, which is no different from the first stage, objectification renders control of production self-regulating and automatic.

The question of degradation detains Hume as little as it would one born to serfdom. “Gentle custom,” an irony of nomenclature, is source of unyielding tyranny, a natural inevitability, a gravity, a centripetus, that overpowers consciousness of immediacy. Anything falling under its influence is brought down. Such is, as we have seen, the fate of the attention. An economy of thought chooses itself over that of sensitivity. Subjective necessity chooses itself over will, continuity over disruption, sameness over difference: choiceless automaticity! “This is the way things are done.” Mechanicality defers asking after the coming-to-be, the

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origin, the ab-origin. Deference is a dislocation of Hume's perplexity concerning how an ephemeral impression differs from a stolid thought. The confusion is the postponement of a crisis. Between impressions and ideas yawns a gulf of consciousness marked "by their different degrees of force and vivacity." To neutralize a dangerous abyss, Hume resorts to the same device used successfully with the blank color. Picture a spectrum, not now of colors but of intensities. They form a rainbow of equalities, each incrementally congruent to its predecessor, all ordered by measurement. In the spectrum, a gap of consciousness is nonexistent in the same way a shade of blue is not missing. The difference between the two is invisible because difference itself is. What separates different forms *and* contents is not anything that can be named as different—gap toothed and barbarous. The separation cannot be bridged by the spirit of resemblance, that magical wand, whose power is to join impressions by affinity and similarity. Idea and impression are unlikes that resemblance cannot make alike. Even within the field of object consciousness, resemblance plays only a shadowy, deficient part.

Obscure to the nature of a shift in consciousness, Hume is forced to trumpet a new and impossible role for resemblance. Resemblance is recast as retentivity. Under the tutelage of this role, ideas are given the capability to "mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses." The labor of knowledge starts with xeroxing sensory information and goes into production from there. As critics from many schools have noted, only on the supposition of a privilege does tyranny gain a foothold. In this case, privilege belongs to a viewpoint that enables Hume to see what a perception in itself resembles. The innocence of resemblance thus becomes the wolf in sheep's clothing, for the viewpoint is none other than the gaze, at point-blank range. The gaze gazes retentively. Lo and behold, perceptual immediacy becomes productive, representational consciousness! To render experience memorable, the gaze annuls difference and opts for sameness of objectification.

While rimmed with confusions, Hume's peculiar lack of transparency suggests an advance of the question. Higher and lower, charged and depleted, impression and idea, are disjoined by difference unsympathetic to a logic of choice. The gap is there. It cannot be filled by a succession of likenesses comprehensible to a reason that then operates among them. Difference relates to nei-

ther one nor the other nor both nor either. It embodies a lack—of a principle of comprehension, of reason, of why *this* came into being, of what to do about it. In one consciousness's being degraded, the other is called forth. The higher, more active consciousness—of impressions—is crowned with immediacy and made up of “sensations or movements.” It is unmodified by productive forces that impeded an unimpeded unfolding of awareness. From the arche name *I* to the world with which it communes, consciousness travels in contact with things, without loss—in the way sound fills a hall, bringing music to audience without audibly diluting itself. The image suggests how such an economy operates. A series of exchanges in which the pressure of the attention energizes and is energized by what it contacts maintains a level of “vivacity” that characterizes a higher consciousness. One thing is apparent to me in this image: that the utter transience of an impression is an accidental, not an essential feature of liveliness. A reciprocity of action such as described defines a community of beings through whose relations an energy level may be maintained.

The pathos of the disruption: “The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation.”¹⁶ Yet Hume remains fixed in a posture that forbids him from seeing the disruption for the pathos. Thus he unwittingly includes as elements of immediacy the contents of “when we hear or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will.”¹⁷ The additions are not new configurations of energy, force, or power—basic percipience—but constructive or productive renditions of primary figures. They belong not to the raw and immediate but the processed and interpreted.

Knowledge born into a state of privation. Knowledge is impoverishment and deficit, energy crisis and depression. Knowledge keeps its intimacy with thanatos. All of these aspects come clearer when we see that an overstressed memory—a retentivity—comes to being simultaneous with loss. A blessing that belongs by right to the red twin is stolen away. The white twin, its thief, retains it. Jacob rather than Esau succeeds Isaac, Esau who by right of birth should. The rightful bloodline, vital, somatic, and silent, is cut short by deceit. Only the sickly pallor of thought, the cunning, contriving, manipulating line is victor. Thus is retentivity forever scarred, forever bent over to protect itself against a loss that, being coeval—*being twinned*—with itself, is irradicable in time.

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Born deprived and depleted, object consciousness is spent before it begins. As Plato observes, the condition places it in relation to eros. *Je suis mort!* The productive intellect is discharge, enervation, sexual death. We can, on this ground, understand how Hume and other (male) figures come to view a disrupted consciousness from which thought descends by a stolen blessing. Immediacy is charged with erotic life. It is the turgid, preorgasmic condition, filled, liquid, labile, unattached to aspects of the field, improvisational, energetic. All desirables but one have been cleared from the field. The summum bonum, the climax, gives a shape and consistency to perception and action. All lines of force point toward it; all lines of influence derive from it. To approach the source of definition is to allow a more fully articulate field. But approach is treacherous. Fullness of impression lies closest to an inevitable inversion, sudden and pleasurable collapse, discharge of energy, dynamic of loss and retention—the blank. At the apex of sexual knowledge, at the peak from which one takes survey of all things, waits the blank. With the patience of a guerilla, it waits to void fullness, fluency, vitality, relation. And to leave . . . nothing.