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The Rise of the Invisible

Microscopes, Keyholes, and Novels: 1665-1765

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English,
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Abstract

The argument of this thesis is that the invisible, as it appeared to writers and readers of post-Restoration England, was an entity that required various forms of assistance in order to come to light. Understood not as an inaccessible dead end that put reason to a halt, but rather as an incentive to search for knowledge, the invisible could stand as an apt metaphor for the entire idea of Enlightenment. Chronologically, the thesis spans between 1665, the year when early-modern English microscopy came to maturity with the publication of Robert Hooke's *Micrographia,* and 1765, the year when Laurence Sterne got out of print the eighth book of *Tristram Shandy,* where, for the first time, the figure of the keyhole is formulated in a critical way. These chronological landmarks are fixed to cover an entire century, although references are made throughout the thesis to authors, works, and times that exceed the limits of this period. Hooke (as well as other early practitioners of the discipline of microscopy) will offer the starting point of the whole thesis, by suggesting that the new optical instrument used in early-modern scientific experiments came about with an indication that everything in the world must contain something invisible, which justifies the use of prosthetic vision. Containing, thus, the invisible within a discourse of intrusion and inquisitiveness, microscopical observations consolidated the ground for what became a concern with justifying intrusion for juridical purposes. This is the subject matter of the second section of the thesis, where the trope of the keyhole will be analysed from the perspective of justice's ability to act in a self-transgressive way (by allowing and even encouraging law infringements) in order to permit its discourse to be materialized. The last component of the thesis is dedicated to a discussion about the strength and significance of purposefully created gaps in the narratives of eighteenth-century novels. Technologies of penetration into the texture of texts, such gaps materialized in four different aspects, each regarded in conjunction with a characteristic novel: *Pamela* and the fainting heroine, *The Female Quixote* and the intrusive narrator, *Fanny Hill* and the impediments of explicit description, and *Tristram Shandy* and the 'typographical trick' of the blank page.

Oh, how unlike the place from whence they fell!

(John Milton, *Paradise Lost)*

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Table of contents

Introduction: On Lenses, Holes, Gaps, Screens, and Functions 13

SECTION ONE: Microscopes 37

Chapter 1. The state of microscopy 39

Argument 39

Annoying aberrations 46

The eighteenth century 49

The turn to personal use 53

The instrument 56

The English Virtuoso 61

Chapter 2. The life of a specimen 67

Object vs. specimen 67

The Perpetually Incipient Experiment 73

Absorbed and theatrical: The aesthetic life of a specimen 78

Chapter 3: Superlatives of vision 89

Monsters revealed by the ‘artificial informer’ 89

Exceptional attributes 97

The enlargement of the small 102

SECTION TWO: Keyholes 109

Argument 113
Chapter 4. Keyholes and Law 119
The legal status of keyholes 119
The face of justice: A very short introduction 130
The problem of deposition, a problem of justice 132
Eighteenth-century witnesses and the games of law 139
Chapter 5. The rise of the overlooked witness 149
Benefits of law 149
Too close for comfort. The servant at the keyhole 154
Chapter 6. The legalized voyeur 163
Absorption and theatricality in keyhole testimonies 163
Once, twice, three times, and more: A case study 169
Theatricality and voyeurism 173
Justifying the voyeur 177
C18 to C21: A conclusion 179

SECTION THREE: Novels 185
Argument 189
Chapter 7. Sight and site 193
On literary voyeurism in C18 193
Closure and disclosure: Interior space 203
and the invitation to watch 203
Of keyholes and portals 210
Poorly furnished novels 216
Chapter 8. Looking for the reader 223
Argument 223
Pamela, or the dream, the swoon, and the participant reader 225
The Female Quixote and the sound of the narrative voice 232
Fanny Hill, pornography, and descriptive insufficiency 242
Tristram Shandy and typographic invisibilia 253

Bibliography 261

Introduction

On Lenses, Holes, Gaps, Screens, and Functions

The following thesis will not provide a definition of the invisible, in spite of its title. It will rather instantiate methods of approaching invisibility and of making it possible for the invisible to erupt from its underground in order to inhabit a world dominated by that which can be seen.

Daniel C. Fouke explains that early-modern natural philosophy could only conceive of the invisible by means of analogical inference: "When the phenomena produced by a visible mechanism were similar to another class of phenomena, it was permissible to explain the latter by an invisible mechanism analogous to that which produced the former."[1] It will become apparent in the following thesis that this argument not only applies to natural philosophy.Analogical reasoning was the key to the doors of all representation, even though it appeared best articulated in natural philosophy. Michel Foucault identified a major rupture in Western thought precisely in a shift in the way nature was represented. From *histories* to *natural histories,* a jump performed around mid-seventeenth century with the publication of John Johnston's *Natural History of Quadrupets* (1657), the transformation was not just a terminological one. It was not simply an addition to a title, but the illustration of the realization that nature could be measured, calculated, and explained. As Foucault has imagined it, this was not a matter of historicizing nature, but a case of history becoming natural.[2] Analogies worked well for this purpose, since they provided a representational foundation for the interconnectedness of nature. Before the moment of rupture, nature had been described in the language and rhetoric of similarity:

> History was the inextricable and completely unitary fabric of all that was visible of things and of the signs that had been discovered or lodged in them: to write the history of a plant or an animal was as much a matter of describing its elements or organs as of describing the resemblances that could be found in it, the virtues that it was thought to possess, the legends

[1] Daniel C. Fouke, "Mechanical and 'Organical' Models in Eighteenth-Century Explanations of Biological Reproduction," *Science in Context* 3, no. 2 (1989): 366.
[2] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), 128.

> and stories with which it had been involved, its place in heraldry, the medicaments that were concocted from its substance, the foods it provided, what the ancients had recorded of it, and what travellers might have said of it.[3]

But what was connected in this mode of representation was not a series of natural objects strewn together to form a class, a system. It was rather a case of distinct, individual objects being referred to a discourse that was not only larger than the object itself, but which also brought into the definition of the object connotations cultivated in other territories, in a totality of significations that contained the entire system of the world. Prior to Johnston's *Natural History,* objects were held in a totalizing receptacle, where signs were preordained, and knowledge was possible through divination. After Johnston, the emphasis moved dramatically to analysis.[4] Now, signs were made accessible by an effort of the mind: "Because the mind analyses, the sign appears. Because the mind has signs at its disposal, analysis never ceases."[5] And this is how signs became relevant in a discourse of their own, where links were established by virtue of analogies, and where knowledge of signs was distributed within well-specified classes (limited, that is, to the perimeter of those classes, instead of being let loose to roam the fields of endless similarity). This is how objects began to be classified as such. This is also how nature retreated in order to make room for man to impose his signs upon the world. Natural signs now became harder to grasp, and the deeper one penetrated into nature the harder was the effort required to put into understanding the semantics of it. One way out of this impasse (the way out of a difficult, ever more complicated semantics) was to *manufacture* signs:

> When one establishes a conventional sign, it is always possible (and indeed necessary) to choose it in such a way that it will be simple, easy to remember, applicable to an indefinite number of elements, susceptible of subdivision within itself and of combination with other signs; the man-made sign is the sign at the peak of its activity. It is the man-made sign that draws the dividing line between man and animal; that transforms imagination into voluntary memory, spontaneous attention into reflection, and instinct into rational knowledge.[6]

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[3] Ibid., 129.

[4] This sounds as though Johnston's work had marked a drastic division (discursive and historical) and that his book generated a sudden and complete paradigm shift. Of course, things were not exactly like that. Johnston's *Natural History* was an exponent of a move that happened gradually, in a long history.

[5] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 61.

[6] Ibid., 62.

It is in this capsule of the manufactured sign that the argument of the present thesis is situated. The technologies of visualisation recorded and discussed in the three sections that follow are all artificial signs. They are instruments employed to push nature away. Microscopes aid impotent natural sight and create objects (and signs) that distance nature from its own manifestations. Magnifying lenses turn natural objects into artefacts. Keyholes intrude into spaces where human eyes are also powerless, made so by a discourse of privacy that imagines all intimate spaces to be impenetrable. By showing that this is not the case, keyholes render a naturalized (discursively so) assumption inoperative. Novelistic gaps (the keyholes and the microscopes of the novel genre) also struggle against a taken-for-granted hypothesis that reading is linear and impossible to interrupt. That it is not so is evidenced by developments in the genre around the mid-eighteenth century, when the smooth surface of the text was perforated by various gaps: stop-signs implanted into the narrative in order to halt it, and allow for reflection (the human quality of reasoning) to take the stage.

But to return to the effort itself. Bringing the invisible to light (that which exists but is not yet known) was not a simple matter of seeing and reproducing the sight, in no case an epiphany or the work of a magic wand (of divination, in Foucault). On the contrary, the unveiling of the invisible needed to be facilitated; it had to be aided by technologies. This is the core of the argument of this thesis: the realization that all the instantiations recorded here are illustrations of technological aids brought about in favour of things not readily visible, but which formed the foundation of that which could be perceived with the naked eye. What is meant by 'the naked eye' here is not sense perception performing in all its nudity, but a state where things have turned out to be available, when an observer, beholder or reader can see what has always been there, lying in the deep recesses of an all-encompassing taken-for-granted-ness.

Here I need to outline the larger key concepts for my argument, which pertain to all three sections. To start with, I see the possibility of turning invisibility into non-invisibility (or visibleness) through the agency of an event.[7] Without an event, which allows for the eruption of the implicitness of the invisible, there would be no visualisation of things hidden to the eye. I understand the event in Deleuze's terms, as an eruption through a screen, or liminal interposition, that exists on the surface of a chaos

[7] *Visibility* is the span of one's field of vision, while *invisibility* is the quality of being potentially present but in fact un-materialized: so the two are not quite the opposites of each other; hence the need to think of the reverse of invisibility as non-invisibility, or rather visibleness, for want of a better word.

representing a sum of multiple potentialities, and which permits only manifestations of singular instantiations. These are instantiations of the chaos itself, as well as embodiments of various potentialities formerly contained in that chaos.

This requires some explication. To Deleuze (via Leibniz and Whitehead) the screen is what gives substante to the chaotic wealth of possibilities that lies at the bottom of it, as if the screen were the lid of a boiling pot in which all potentialities, taken together, boiled and rose to reach the stage of evaporation. "What are the conditions that make an event possible?" Deleuze asks, and provides this answer: "Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes."[8] For the production of events, it is necessary that the screen operate as an orifice: a hole that gives vent to an energy existing in a latent state (i.e. in a state that cannot be seen). An event is, thus, the result of the materialization of a potentiality which pre-existed but could not be known unless it passed through the open orifice. What doesn't pass the threshold of the screen will remain forever unknown, forever invisible. This is why Deleuze says that "Chaos does not exist," in the sense of not being perceivable. Instead, "it is an abstraction because it is inseparable from a screen that makes something – something rather than nothing – emerge from it."[9]

But the event comes to the surface by virtue of a tension that it contains, a tension that has made its emergence possible. Deleuze stresses that the event is not a singularity. As an individuality (a concrete single instantiation), it is rather a sum of all the energies in the chaotic soup that have made it possible for it to rise to the surface. It is, in other words, an element (one contained and containing):

> If we call an element everything that has parts and is a part, but also what has intrinsic features, we say that the individual is a 'concrescence' of elements. This is something other than a connection or a conjunction. It is, rather, a *prehension*: an element is the given, the 'datum' of another element that prehends it. Prehension is individual unity. Everything prehends its antecedents and its concomitants and, by degrees, prehends a world. The eye is a prehension of light. Living beings prehend water, soil, carbon, and salts.[10]

This is precisely how Leibniz conceives of monads: they are indivisible totalities that exist by virtue of a concatenation of qualities. A monad may have, for him, "no windows, through which anything could come in or go out," but it is not a block without attributes.

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[8] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque,* tr. Tom Conley (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 76.
[9] Ibid.
[10]Ibid., 78.

Monads are endowed with qualities, because "otherwise they would not even be existing things." In other words, "the Monads, if they had no qualities, would be indistinguishable from one another, since they do not differ in quantity."[11] So a monad is, finally, a sum total of intrinsic qualities. And it is precisely through this intrinsicness of qualities that change (newness) is possible: "The natural changes of the Monads come from an internal principle, since an internal cause can have no influence upon their inner being."[12] A monad, therefore, may be thought of as an event, since it is a sum total of qualities, some of which will rise to the surface of the indivisible entity.

But the suture − the 'concrescence' of elements that make the substance of an event − also suggests that the event is a part of something greater, of which it is only a stage, a fold. (Deleuze starts his book on Leibniz with the essential clarification that the Baroque is a "trait" that "endlessly produces folds").[13] Thus, an event testifies to the chaos from which it has emerged: it enters the world through the screen by bringing about evidence that the chaos (the vacillating multiplicity of possibilities) actually exists. The event is the *only* evidence that the chaos exists, since, we need recall, the chaos "is an abstraction."

So the 'rise of the invisible' is the materialization of a potentiality. Seen from this perspective, it will probably be easier to understand the insistence in the present thesis on what seems to be a collection of apertures, of spaces left open for the emergence of events. A better title for my thesis could have been "The Rise of the Hole" (rising now not in the sense of going up, but in the sense of growing up), since the following sections and chapters are explanations of various orifices which, in their own ways, mark puncture points, or screens, prepared for the nascence of intrinsic yet invisible realities.

In order for an orifice to work it needs to fulfil an essential function: it has to allow flow through itself. An orifice, thus, not only exists in order to *fulfil* a function, but *is itself* a function, in the mathematical sense of the word: an input yielding a corresponding output. $f(x) = y$ means that for every input of x there is an equivalent output y resulting from it. In order for the output to be generated (in order for the input to ever take place), a function is necessary, which delimits the rules according to which the multitude of potential *x*'s can, when given a concrete value, become *y*'s. By following the rule delimited by the function, one gets consistent results. The function is a screen, then, in

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[11]Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "The Monadology,"in *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings,* tr. and ed. Robert Latta, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), 219-221.
[12]Ibid., 223.
[13]Deleuze, *The Fold,* 3.

the Deleuzian sense. And the screen is a function too, since it designates the modality of the passing of chaos into event.

Alfred North Whitehead, on whose parallel account (apparently uninfluenced by Leibniz) Deleuze constructs his trope of the screen, speaks of *ingressions* to describe occurrences not unlike mathematical functions. He defines these *ingressions* as the means by which objects make their way into events. Now, Whitehead's concepts need further clarification, because by *objects* (italicized here in order to differentiate them from what is commonly understood to be objects) he means immutable and identical entities ("elements in nature which do not pass"), similar to Plato's ideas. They are in stark contradiction to events, which are transitory and different ("an event is essentially distinct from every other event").[14] Events, which appear in an infinity of instantiations, bear inside them aspects of the eternal *objects*. When we recognize events ("recognition is an awareness of sameness"), we in fact recognize the traces of the *objects* in them: because recognition presupposes stability and identity, of which only *objects* are capable.[15] With these clarifications in mind, Whitehead explains that "the ingression of an object into an event is the way the character of the event shapes itself in virtue of the being of the object."[16] By performing an ingression into the event, the *object* (the eternal and immutable entity) makes the event possible. So the event is conditioned by the *object*, precisely as in Deleuze. I retain the idea of ingression because it articulates the concept of passage: the way that the chaotic multitude of combinatorial possibilities emerges out of itself into the event. This passage is the Deleuzian screen, of course. Only in this case it is not named as a noun, but as a verb, which I think illustrates better the nature of the orifice. To ingress means to penetrate, to find a way in (or rather to have *found* that way in). The invisible emerges as a result of a penetration, which is transgression, an almost illicit act of coming to light, an illegal birth.

The three sections of the present inquiry are expected to be read as analyses of instances of ingression, or of the discovery of aspects that evade recognition in an unaided context but which, when revealed, prove to have been the qualities that resided in *objects* the whole time. These analyses are meant to some extent to answer the problem which Whitehead calls "objects in empty space": *objects* that escape identification. "Nature is such," he elucidates, "that there can be no events and no objects without the ingression of objects into events. Although there are events such that the ingredient objects evade

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[14] Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 143.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 144.

our recognition. These are events in empty space."[17] Microscopes, keyholes, and novels: they all deal with these "objects in empty space," which are, in some sense, events that remain unknown. But reaching the realization that unknown events exist is only possible if at least one such event is discovered first. Then, the chaos is acknowledged. Then, it becomes known to the observer that other similar instantiations are equally possible. This is the reason why microscopical, keyhole, or novelistic events are repetitive − why they don't rest on a single instantiation, or a single manifestation of the chaos. As will become apparent, microscopes construct their specimens precisely on the fundamental assumption of repetitiveness. One of the most upsetting insights attained by early-modern microscope users was the fact that their crude lenses could not allow exact repetitions of observations. But that is just a confirmation that replication of observation is at the core of microscopy. Keyhole witnesses are also fascinated by the range of possibilities presented to them by the aperture. They return to keyholes in search of new instantiations, and thus become voyeurs. It cannot be sufficiently stressed that novels thrive on repetitions, on replications not of the same imagery or of the same trope, but of the same practice. Dialogues, descriptions, digressions, everything that is not diegetic, everything that doesn't offer a story (*this* story) is a way to puncture the narrative. And they are not present in isolation. There is not just one digression in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, or in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. They come in large numbers, because the fascination of being able to penetrate narration is far too great to be missed. This is the fascination of the invisible, of the promise one gets of a revelation to come. If this sounds religious, messianic, it is meant to be so. Manifestations of the invisible are expected with a religiosity of which only a voyeur is capable.

Michael McKeon (to bring the matter closer to the chronological framework of my thesis) offers yet another possible reading of the problem of invisibility. He has insisted upon the fact that the Enlightenment operated on the border between tacit and explicit knowledge. What 'happened' in the eighteenth century was, for him, precisely a transformation of the tacit (traditional) knowledge into an explicit (modern) type of inquiry, in which the datum of every question was placed in the open, in contrast to the arcane structure of politically-oriented discourses of the early-seventeenth century, for instance, when Charles I ruled by absolutist measures, and when political issues were silently performed in the secrecy of opaque state institutions.

In McKeon's view,

[17] Ibid., 145.

> 'traditional' knowledge is *tacit* in the sense of being deeply embedded in a political, social, and cultural matrix of practice whose guidance suffuses daily experience and discourages the separation out of knowledge for self-conscious examination. 'Modern' knowledge is, on the contrary, an *explicit* and self-conscious awareness, characterized not by the way it saturates social practices but by the way it satisfies the canons of epistemology, which impose on knowledge the test of self-justifying self-sufficiency.[18]

In other words, the transmutation from the tacit to the explicit is a form of liberation from the constraints of egotistic silence (which is a return of knowledge upon itself). But what is this silence, this tacitness, if not the acknowledgment of the fundamental invisibility of culture (in the ideological sense), if not the acknowledgment of the fact that culture rests, by definition, on invisible traces that surface only in the shape of readily-accepted suppositions? To move from implied, silent knowledge to the openness of the spoken word and of the illustrated (and illustrative) image is, from Heidegger, to mobilise a distinction between the usual and the unusual (a tricky operation, since it evades common definitions): "The usual and the most usual – precisely the most usual whose usualness goes so far that it is not even known or noticed in its usualness – this most usual itself becomes in wonder what is most unusual."[19] Wonder, which is not a state of impotent perplexity, but rather the stimulus behind the inception of philosophical investigation, is a form of mediation, which operates by opening the familiar to interpretation. The familiar, or the usual ("the most usual") is that which passes unnoticed, because so embedded into cultural habits, into praxis, that it has become invisible (or better still, it has been invisible all the way). By wondering, a subject brings forth, from its hidden recesses, the usual in its utmost unusualness, because only the moment of revelation makes it *appear*; and when it appears it appears as uncommon (as never before seen). Once again, tacit turned into explicit is a way of mediating the unveiling of the invisible, which has always been there, but has never been noticed (McKeon's thesis). And thus we return to the fundamental problem of the event, of the orifice that enables, and arrive, therefore, at the microscope.

To speak of microscopes means to speak of scientific instruments which make it possible for an observer to discover "a new World," as Robert Hooke, the most important author of early microscopy, enthusiastically announced in his *Micrographia*

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[18] Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), xix.

[19] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy. Selected 'Problems' of 'Logic,'* tr. Richard Rojceqicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 144.

(1665). As Barbara Maria Stafford has put it, "the microscopic seer was the secular priest of the Enlightenment. Through scientific rites he brought the faraway and foreign close in luminous epiphanies."[20] In doing so, the microscope "undermined confidence in the manifest image of the world."[21] It made possible the coming to light of the invisible yet latently existent part of ontology by denying visible nature the wrongly assumed right to regulate Creation. In this way, one could say that microscopy was primarily a discipline that facilitated the rise of events (every examination of a specimen is an event, since it disturbs an existent order, or a preconception, or a visibleness that is not challenged) by situating the lens of the instrument above the chaos represented by the living, un-dissected body, placing that lens above it like a screen. The magnifying glass is not just an avenue for the observer to penetrate into the subvisible structures of familiar objects, but also a means whereby the invisibility contained in those familiar objects is allowed to come to the surface, and to inhabit the world as we know it through sight.

The theory of continuity represented by the Deleuzean event, whereby an emergence is thought in terms of its deep roots in a *prehensive* unity, may very well explain an early-modern biological axiom which many microscopists of the period took for granted.[22] This was the theory of *emboîtement,* which said that the organs of a future embryo were preformed, so that humans existed, in a minute version, in the semen before fecundation. The concept of preformation raised an interesting problem in relation to the causality of generation, which was regarded as a chain of identical and unalterable qualities making birth a matter of repetition. Those who supported this theory were convinced that, as Nicholas Russell explains,

> the preformed embryo had pre-existed for many generations, ultimately that all the animals in the world now and to come had been pre-existent as tiny forms in the earliest animals created. There had only ever been an Act of

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[20] Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1991), 345.

[21] Catherine Wilson, *The Invisible World. Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 69.

[22] Prehension, Deleuze says, is a binding agent, one that organizes chaotic potentialities by placing folds upon folds of those potentials. The structure resulting from this packing up of chaotic dark matter is what pushes everything towards the screen, towards its becoming an event. This binding agent, or 'concrescence,' "is something other than a connection or a conjunction. It is, rather, a *prehension:* an element is the given, the 'datum' of another element that prehends it. Prehension is individual unity. Everything prehends its antecedents and its concomitants and, by degrees, prehends a world. The eye is a prehension of light, living beings prehend water, soil, carbon, and salts." (Deleuze, *The Fold,* 78.)

> Creation and God had directed the development of all animals from the very beginning. The constant intervention of God [...] had been replaced by a single, bold, initial act, so that all future generations were packaged up within the first members of all species.[23]

Every birth is, according to these circumstances, a Baroque structure of folds (in the sense of Deleuze and Leibniz): "the Baroque fold unfurls all the way to infinity."[24] Signs of this theory are present in *Tristram Shandy*, where, in the debut of the long-lasting narrative of his conception, the hero/narrator brings into discussion the homunculus, the minute replica of his future self which "consists as we do, of skin, hair, fat, flesh, veins, arteries, ligaments, nerves, cartileges, bones, marrow, brains, glands, genitals, humours, and articulations."[25] Such visions were made possible by the microscope, which was the embodiment of a major crisis in the history of the visible world. With the invention of optical instruments, this crisis indicated that the world as seen with the naked eye started to appear insufficiently equipped to sustain curiosity any further. In his *Experimental Philosophy* of 1664, Henry Power, the Halifax doctor turned microscope enthusiast, praised the instrument (via Bacon) precisely for its inclination towards the minima, and for its implicit circumvention of grand-scale living, blatantly visible, things. "The knowledge of man," he paraphrased Baron Verulam,

> hath hitherto been determin'd by the view or sight, so that whatsoever is invisible, either in respect of the fineness of the body itself, or the smallness of the parts, or of the subtilty of its motion, is little enquired; and yet these be the things that govern Nature principally: How much therefore are we oblig'd to modern industry, that of late hath discover'd this advantageous Artifice of Glasses, and furnish'd our necessities with such Artificial Eyes, that now neither the fineness of the Body, nor the smallness of the parts, nor the subtilty of its motion can secure them from our discovery?

The microscope appears here as a Deleuzian screen, or a function, that exercises its openness without interruption. Indeed, the feeling permeating the entire period was that this was a historical moment of change, when the semiotics of relevance was turning in favour of the formerly neglected. Susan Stewart says that "the microscope opens up significance to the point at which all the material world shelters a microcosm."[26] The

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[23]Nicholas Russell, *Like Engend'ring Like. Heredity and Animal Breeding in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 44.
[24]Deleuze, *The Fold,* 7.
[25] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 6.
[26]Susan Stewart, *On Longing.Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 41.

invisible, in these terms, was staging a spectacular appearance, bringing forth its virtual omnipresence. Even contemporary critics (Margaret Cavendish, George Berkeley) were caught up in this craze, and in spite of their professed vociferous denigration or careful philosophical debunking (or precisely *because* of them!), proved that the rise of the invisible could not pass unnoticed. Proofs of this rise, multitudes of events of idiosyncratically conducted microscopic observations by a mass of enthusiasts increasingly harder to count and control, were everywhere. "The power and the pervasiveness of imagery permeated discussions of conception – imagery flowing like a river of words – and misconception – imagery patched together like a showy monster."[27]

[27] Stafford, *Body Criticism*, 362.

The keyhole was not met with the same open, public debate, since it did not form the object of any proper inquiry. Moreover, keyholes and the actions they permit were by definition illicit. Their transgressiveness is the major reason why they were not brought to the fore of public discourses. In the provisions of legality, the keyhole, a screen just like the microscope, a discoverer just like it, was condemned for its intrusive quality. What is worth mentioning in relation to the keyhole is the fact that in order for it to become a form of intrusion into privacy it had to change its nature. The events revealed to keyhole witnesses would have stayed forever unknown (eternal invisibilities) had the aperture not altered its purpose. This metamorphosis from an object that illustrates domestic security to an object that transgresses precisely that feeling of safety is what discredited the keyhole in the face of justice. Legal proscriptions provided that keyhole peeping and eavesdropping (two names for a quasi-identical crime of *lèse-domesticité*, to make up a word) be indictable at the law as nuisances (disturbances of one's right to enjoy the peace of one's property and privacy). Since as early as the first statute of Westminster, promulgated in 1275 by Edward I Longshanks, nuisances by eavesdropping were mentioned in jurisprudential texts as reminders for court leets (local juridical authorities, the lowest in the hierarchy of law-imparting institutions) to pursue and, whenever necessary, punish home invasion of this kind.[28] The keyhole was not mentioned in laws, but it was somehow assumed that it should have fallen under the same category. If such was the case (jurisprudential texts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries passed over nuisances by eavesdropping without much detail, and obviously made no mention of keyholes, since they had never been explicitly addressed in the past), then it may not go amiss to think that the neglect with which it was treated could be an indication of the keyhole's power to reveal more than eavesdropping: more disturbing facts, more compelling crimes. Plus, keyholes had the advantage of visual proof. Eavesdropping, on the other hand, was disqualified by the rule of hearsay, which provided that no testimony of facts heard from other than first-hand witnesses (i.e. *eye* witnesses) was acceptable in court.

No matter how we look at the two, it is clear that taking furtive glances into the privacy of others was by law intolerable. And yet, the keyhole features in a multitude of trial transcripts as the means of acquiring incriminating evidence against the defendant. The question immediately arises: why? Why did the law relax its otherwise very strict

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[28] John Kitchin, *Jurisdictions: Or, the Lawful Authority of Courts Leet, Courts Baron, Court of Marshalseys, Court of Pypowder, and Ancient Demesn*. (London, 1675).

stipulations and allow an essentially illicit act to be employed at the very core of its (the law's) authority: the court and the trial? The answer is that keyholes can provide the law with that which to the same law is invisible: the unfolding of the events under consideration. Criminal or not, a keyhole testimony is a form of evidence. It tells what happened at a moment situated in the past, and in the proximity of others. This is the most superficial explanation, of course. But there is a more complex explanation as well, which does not have justice as its focus. In this sense, the act of peeping through a keyhole is an act that enables the screen that stands between visibleness and invisibility to act as a channel for the evental dispersion of the unseen. For this reason, a testimony is expected to be (and it is, in most cases) an event: it disturbs a status quo, and makes the most usual unusual by exposing it to public examination. Keyholes have the role of rendering this aspect more evident because they have precisely the shape and the function of a screen. In the case of keyholes it is even more evident than in the case of microscopes that there is a puncture in the surface of the visible, which facilitates the surfacing of the unseen. In an act of keyhole peeping the criminal deed performed by those who are witnessed comes forth, or so to speak, gives itself in. It gives itself in not as illicitness but as invisibility. And it gives itself in at the moment of the event: the moment when it is witnessed. That is the most important moment in a career of a criminal deed: the instance when it is seen, not the instance when it is judged and sentenced. Without the witness and his/her unfortunate presence at the keyhole (his/her unfortunate curiosity), the criminal deed would have remained unknown, invisible like all those qualities of a specimen revealed by a microscope.

And now from lenses and holes to gaps, a trope present in literature in a multitude of shapes and forms, most of them employed liberally in eighteenth-century novels. Cynthia Wall talks about techniques for stopping the text, for interposing a breach in the flow of the narrative. She uses as a general term for this stopping *ekphrasis*, a word which has come to designate descriptions of works of art, but which Wall sees in its original Greek sense, that of "expository speech which vividly brings the subject before our eyes."[29] Such an expository speech (Wall doesn't say it but we assume) would function as the rise of something invisible. But isn't literature all about bringing invisible things to the reader's eye and mind? The answer I give in the third section of this thesis is yes, and as a consequence this section dedicated to novels continues the discussion on keyholes. It continues it because gaps in narratives are very similar to keyholes. If they stop the narrative, they do so in order to expose the conventionality of a literary text, the artifice that stands behind it. But let me exemplify.

In the preface to his edition to Shakespeare's works (1765), Johnson took notice of the need an inexperienced reader might feel to consult footnotes, whenever the meaning of the primary text was not readily graspable. "Notes are often necessary," he mused, "but they are necessary evils."[30] The greatest problem such textual apparatuses imposed was precisely the interruption of the process of reading. Johnson, however, did not see the worth of such gaps in the narrative process, since he was not concerned with the issue of invisibility. However, his admonition remains as a valid illustration of the punctures that occur in a written text in the process of its reading.

> Particular passages are clearer by notes, but the general effect of the work is weakened. The mind is refrigerated by interruption; the thoughts are diverted from the principal subject; the reader is weary, he suspects not why; and at last throws away the book, which he had too diligently studied.[31]

It is not clear what made Johnson believe that the reading of footnotes would cause in the reader such an irritation. But the "refrigeration" of the mind is a strong trope. It indicates that interruption (gap) can have significant effects on a text. The puncture that it marks is the screen through which a truth comes to the surface: the truth of the text's conditional nature. While Johnson stressed that such repeated fits and starts altered the

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[29] Cynthia Sundber Wall, *The Prose of Things: Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

[30]Samuel Johnson, "Preface," in *Johnson on Shakespeare,* ed. Arthur Sherbo, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson,* vol. VII (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968): 111.

[31] Ibid.

unity of the text by giving pre-emption to its parts ("parts are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed", he voiced),[32] it is precisely in a direction opposite to his that we need to look for what it is that really happens to reading when it is interrupted. Gaps of this kind show that the common assumption of fluent reading is not sustainable. They bring to the surface the stronger truth that every act of reading is an act of cross-reading, of intertextual consultation of other sources, of other parallel texts, which pierce through the present instantiation in search for recognition. This truth became clearer as time (in the history of literature) went on, and when a structuralist like Gérard Genette argued, in the twentieth century, for the primacy of such interruptions. With regards to description (*mimesis*), the direct opposite, in the classical literature of ancient Greece, to narrative (*diegesis*), Genette has this to say : "We know that traditional rhetoric places description, together with the other figures of style, among the ornaments of discourse: extended, detailed description appears here as a recreational pause in the narrative, carrying out a purely aesthetic role, like that of sculpture in a classical building."[33] The statue in a classical building: this is Cynthia Wall's *ekphrasis*. To Genette, description, itself an interruption, is not a thing to be afraid of. Unsurprisingly so, since what he has in mind is what Johnson lacked: the ability to take description as a tool that does not oppose narrative but enriches it. To eighteenth-century literature, description was intrinsically distinguished by the status of the described object. The more respectable the object, the less it needed to be put into words. And conversely, the meaner the object, the more it encouraged detailed descriptions. This is a theory put forth by Irvin Ehrenpreis, who argues that

> Among the Augustans, concrete particularity was a form of overexplicitness that marked the descriptions of vicious, low, or comic characters. Heroes and sympathetic figures required dignity. They normally received distinct analyses only of their moral constitution: their virtues, motives, affections. For their face, body, or clothing a poet often gave no description or merely relied on general epithets.[34]

The attacks on the low were thus effected by means of wordiness, and the gap was widened. The invisibility of the non-dignified subject (not being represented in the high genres, it remained unseen there) is precisely what constitutes the substance of novels

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Gerard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse,* tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 134-35.

[34] Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Literary Meaning and Augustan Values* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), 46.

and satires, which are genres of exposure. Continuing with Ehrenpreis: "To define the virtues and even beauty, the author seemed equipped with public standards, commonly recognized, which he could indicate with easy efficiency. Ugliness, affectation, low life, and vice seemed more various and surprising, and therefore more suitable for concrete particularity."[35] The representation of low topics is, therefore, an event, insofar as it brings forth, through the gap, an aspect that disturbs the ethics of reading.

The present thesis has many more examples to give of gaps that disturb narration. There are four novels in the last chapter of Section III, each concerned with one such particular instantiation of the event of disruption. The argument in this domain of the investigation is that each of these gaps is a call for the reader to intervene in order to solve a moment of crisis: the very crisis of interruption. The first one of these novels, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela,* deals with a rupture provoked by the heroine's loss of consciousness. The leading character has a penchant for fainting in moments when her virtue (the skeleton of the entire story) is under threat. She is also endowed with absolute narratorial authority, as the novel is written in the extremity of the first person. Due to this, Pamela never loses consciousness. Even when she sleeps, she continues in dream the leftover actions started while awake. So when she does lose consciousness, by fainting, the text is pierced by this instance of her unconsciousness, materialized as a loss of narration. And as author, narrator, and protagonist form, in *Pamela*, an indestructible *totum*, it becomes apparent that the only way the story could go on is if the reader intervened in the text (because there simply is no one else to do so). This coming forth of the reader is at the same time a proof that the text depends on him/her for its completion. This is the great secret that *Pamela* reveals: literature is not an independent construct ornamented with meanings delivered by the author readily packaged for consumption. It reveals that readers are equally responsible for making the text what it is.

The second novel analysed in the last chapter is Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote.* In some sense an expansion of the notion of virtue as seen in *Pamela,* this novel features the narrative gap in the shape of an intrusive narrator. This is a voice that tells the reader how to interpret the text. The heroine's Quixotic extravagance in reading romances literally is exposed by the repeated intervention of the voice-over, which alters significantly the way in which the text is understood. In doing so, this outsider (a voice that belongs to an entity that is not materialized among the visible characters of the

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[35] Ibid., 47.

novel) upsets readerly activity incessantly, which is why I have called it a gap, or a disruption of the flow of narration.

The Female Quixote is followed by John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, where the gap takes yet another form, that of a descriptive insufficiency. Pornographic in nature but non-pornographic in language, *Fanny Hill* does not construct sex scenes and descriptions of sexual organs through explicit obscenity. What sets it apart in the history of the English novel is not the fact that it is the first novel of its kind written in the vernacular (much of seventeenth and eighteenth-century pornography read in England was imported from France), but the fact of its surplus. This is a surplus of synonymy. Sexual scenes and sexual organs are described by Cleland as if he didn't know that there was pornography in his novel. Whatever is decoded as pornographic comes not from the actual text, but from an active participation of the reader, who unveils the meanings hidden behind double entendre, allusions, and polysemies. And thus, the gap represented by the interruption (allusion requires a mental effort which straightforwardness doesn't need) opens the text for the reader: an entity that rises from the chaos of unspecified potentialities which can make up a text.

The last novel discussed in this thesis is Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. With Sterne, the notion of the gap takes on another meaning: it is no longer a technology of revelation, but the very fabric of the literary text. In *Tristram Shandy*, as in *A Sentimental Journey*, diegesis takes place in fits and starts, because it is not coagulated. The narrative is a series of interruptions, of gaps, of events, which are meant to bring about the realization that the text is a game played by the author that engendered the book and the reader engendered by it. There is one particular moment in *Tristram Shandy* that most interests me in this chapter: the famous blank page in Volume VI Chapter XXXVIII. Here, the inclusion of the reader is total. By inviting them to participate in a descriptive sport (to fill an empty space with the best description they can imagine of widow Wadman), the novel activates readers as agents of their own desire. The blank page signifies the complete giving in of author and narrator to the authority of the reader, who constructs this portrait (and the novel itself with it) according to their own ideal of beauty. Whatever the result, it cannot be anything less than the best portrait in the world, which is to say, in the world of the reader, who creates it for themselves.

From the very last chapter of the thesis, I should like to perform a jump backwards to the beginning, in order to cast a systematic glance at the internal structure of sections, chapters and subchapters.

Section I, Chapter 1, "The state of microscopy," is probably the most historical part of the thesis. Because microscopy has been rarely discussed in conjunction with law and literature (exceptions are Marjorie Nicholson in the 1930s, and Tita Chico in the early 2000s, although they have only focused on the science-literature dichotomy, leaving the law aside), it needed such a trace of chronology, from the first microscopical tracts and collections of microscopical observations, to the mechanical developments that characterised its trajectory in the eighteenth century. The chapter considers not only the history of the microscope *per se,* but also the existence of a class of scientific enthusiasts who embraced the new optical discipline and performed it with great gusto: the so-called virtuosi. There is a special section dedicated to them in this first chapter, as well as a section dealing with the instrumentalization of sciences in the late-seventeenth century, after the establishment of the Royal Society. Chapter 2, "The life of a specimen," explores exactly what the self-explanatory title suggests: how the specimen appeared under the microscope, what were the forces that shaped its condition, and what exactly is the difference between specimen and object. The argument here is aided by a discussion on the concepts of absorption and theatricality, used by Michael Fried in the book, *Absorption and Theatricality,* in which he expounds the common motif in late-eighteenth century French painting, of the absentminded subject ignoring the possibility of the presence of a beholder. Chapter 3: "Superlatives of vision," is a chapter focused on the aesthetic task performed by microscopical examinations. This chapter is the launching pad for the subsequent discussions on voyeurism and keyhole witnessing developed in Sections II and III.

Section II, "Keyholes." Chapter 4, "Keyholes and Laws," deals with a topic discussed in great detail in this introduction. Suffice to say here that the chapter takes into consideration the transgressiveness of keyhole peeping, which is sanctioned by law but also encouraged by it: on the one hand because it disturbs individual rights to property and privacy, and on the other hand because the barrier represented by this sanction poses the major risk of leaving justice with little or nothing to judge over. In other words, although acknowledged as illicit, keyhole peeping was employed as a means to acquire licit incriminatory information. Chapter 5, "The Rise of the Invisible Witness," goes one step farther by outlining the figure of the witness,his or her legal status, privileges and

limitations, and coming into being as facilitators of the visualisation of things unseen. Chapter 6, "The Legalized Voyeur," isolates one aspect of witnesshood: the pleasure gained from seeing without being seen. The chapter explores definitions of voyeurism and reflects upon instantiations of the concepts of absorption and theatricality in relation to the scopophilic desire to see action unfolding.

Chapter 7, "Sight and Site," deals with three further topics: the gaze, architecture, and portals. What they all have in common is their equal interest in events. The gaze featuring in this chapter is the gaze of power: the destructive gaze and the controlling gaze. The two are situated at opposite extremes of novelistic discourse, in the sense that they are illustrated by two texts which are not novels (William Beckford's *Vathek* – a fantasy that escapes novelistic conceits of setting and subject matter – and Joseph Addison's *The Spectator* – a proto-sociological/cultural survey of urban life and urban apprehensions), and in the sense that they belong at the opposite chronological ends of the eighteenth century. Architecture appears in the discussion as a way to illustrate how the spectacular character of English country houses (the most typical models of high architecture in the Georgian era) was rendered transparent by a number of architectural features which pierced through the solidity of structure to allow the gaze to see whatever was kept secret. This part of the chapter is a continuation of the discussion on keyholes, initiated in Section II but too complex to be limited to that part of the thesis, and also a continuation of the keyhole theme is the chapter dedicated to portals. Here, I borrow the terminology employed in analyses of fantasy literature, especially of texts featuring such portals, which are channels that permit the transfer of a character, along with the reader, from a world of familiarity to one of unfamiliarity.

The last chapter (8), "Looking for the reader," has already been described in some detail, so it needs no further spoiler.

To conclude: the model gathered from Whitehead's and Deleuze's events have somehow placed their mark upon the structure of the present thesis as well. In its multitude of episodes and frequent twists from one point to another, the argument may seem to lack cohesion. This is meant to be so, and for two reasons. First, the main concern has been with events: singular instantiations of the infinite potentialities existing in the melange represented by the unfamiliar invisible. From this perspective, the chapters and subchapters that follow are conceived as both communicating with each other and able to work independently. Second, a sustained discussion on the rise of the invisible as materialized potentiality has not been written yet (or at least I do not know of such enterprise) from the perspective of the three discourses addressed below. In consequence, the thesis turns out to be an exercise in the Baconian style of reasoning through praxis, the first step towards a true inductive science: by gathering examples and by conducting experiments ("all truer interpretation of Nature is built up from instances, and adequate and suitable experiments, where the sense judges only of the experiment, the experiment of Nature and the thing itself"),[36] which can be used later for generalizations. I have not reached that stage of generalization yet, because I do not consider the three discourses mentioned in this thesis as sufficient instantiations of the rise of the invisible. I do not think that by adding more such discourses the problem would have been solved, since the pervasiveness of the invisible (the way I see it, it can never be encapsulated) imposes itself as a problem that can only be solved through Baconian experiments, as a thing that unfolds *ad infinitum*, and which can only be captured in idiosyncrasies.

This, however, does not mean that the several discussions and experiments collected below cannot make a system together. The present thesis is concerned with lenses, holes, and gaps. These are all cavities in some sense. They serve the purpose of facilitating the discovery of the invisible. And this is the most important thing that they have in common.

The following inquiry is also founded on the assumption that common grounds for the manifestations of visual experiences existed in the period, having been generated by Restoration and post-Restoration ('the long eighteenth century'?) interest in exploration, examination, and scopic investigation. These common grounds show through as the widespread welcoming of microscopy (in spite of the occasional criticisms), as the

[36] Francis Bacon, *NovumOrganum, With Other Parts of the Great Instauration*, tr. and ed. Peter Urbach and John Gibson (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1994), 60.

malleability of jurisprudence (which allowed itself to open like an invitation to err by the law), and as the increased readerly awareness that textual material was not all surface (that it contained depths that could be sounded for meaning).

Another common aspect that runs through most of the following sections and chapters consists of an emphasis placed primarily upon products of popular culture. A time in which high and low did not stand on the same firm grounds on which they stood in earlier times, when authority was drawn from literal readings of unchallenged foundational texts, the period following English Restoration was characterized by the mingling of opposites. A strict bi-polarity cannot be said to have existed in the epoch. If only from an administrative point of view, it is relevant to know that "at the local level the middling sort played an important role in the governance of the realm," which made them part of the ruling echelons.[37] Science, at the same time, was performed in select circles, but experiments were witnessed or performed by an increasing number of representatives of the lower classes. Michael Hunter has highlighted the mixed composition of the Royal Society at the end of the seventeenth century. The greatest part of the Society was made up (unsurprisingly) by representatives of the landed gentry and by "sons of Anglican clergy" (together amounting to more than half of the total number of Fellows). However, at the same time, the Society allowed itself to be used by merchants (i.e. middle class) and also by artisans and other individuals from the lowest strata (yeomen included), which together formed an impressive 14 percent of the roll call. In this last category, Hunter mentions William Petty ("son of a Romsey clothworker") and John Ray ("whose father was a blacksmith").[38] The opposite was also the case, and one could draw examples from literature, where someone like the immensely rich Horace Walpole tried a (short-lived) career as a novel writer, a form of popular culture held in disrepute by the advocates of traditional genres. Jurisprudence was also the work of middle classes in the eighteenth century. William Blackstone, the son of a "silkman and freeman of Cheapside, London," ended up as the person in charge of justice for the whole of England.[39] These are only biographical trivialities, but they indicate the extent to which the mingling of low and high could generate the cross-currents that characterized

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[37] Tim Harris, "Problematising Popular Culture," in *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850,* ed. Tim Harris (London: Macmillan, 1995): 16.
[38] Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 60-61.
[39] I. G. Doolittle, "Sir William Blackstone and his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-9): A Biographical Approach," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring, 1983): 100.

popular culture, in which "the privileged classes were active participants."[40] It was, therefore, unavoidable that I would employ products of popular culture in a thesis concerned with three widespread discourses, such as the scientific, the juridical, and the novelistic. Although the argument of the present thesis is not specifically focused on allocations of audiences for popular culture *per se*, various references will be found here to class stratifications, and the general picture of the rise of the middle class is often superimposed on the more precise discussions required by the chapters' principal topics. So, for instance, it will become apparent that justice could be used, in the period, as a vehicle for the correction of social inequalities. Servants witnessing through keyholes illegitimate acts committed by their superiors could rely on the provisions of justice to turn the balance to their own advantage by testifying in court, and thus bringing upon their masters/mistresses a punishment which, at least for the moment, could dethrone the latter from their social and economic privileges.

The thesis is concerned with popular culture in another sense as well: in the sense of using products specific to the middle and low classes for the furthering of cultural, as well as political and economic interests. Microscopy was distributed to its rapidly growing readership via affordable subsidised prints, which helped the discipline in its endeavour to proselytise its doctrine. These included not only books, but also advertising materials, which often delved into microscopy deeper than a contemporary view of advertising would allow, describing in detail the instrument as well as the ways in which it could be employed. In the field of justice, things were similarly employed. Apart from the massive and largely unpurchased treatises of jurisprudence (usually voluminous compilations), knowledge about the workings of justice was disseminated through inexpensive popular prints, such as broadsheets, pamphlets, and printouts of trial transcripts like the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey,* which were produced eight times a year, "a commercial venture, published by some of the leading London printers."[41]Most of these were sensationalist accounts sold for their entertainment value. However, they had a role to play in the acculturation of uninitiated citizens, who could find there the nuts and bolts of justice, and often ways in which the law could be manipulated.

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[40]John Mullan and Christopher Reid, *Eighteenth-Century Popular Culture. A Selection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

[41] Robert B. Shoemaker, "The Old Bailey Proceedings and the Representation of Crime and Criminal Justice in Eighteenth-Century London," *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 3 (July 2008): 563.

Having said all this about the common grounds of this thesis, I return to the distinction between eternal objects and transitory events posited by Whitehead and Deleuze. It looks as though no escape is possible from this essential distinction, and that, no matter how much effort is put into it, the assumption of the pervasiveness of invisibility (the eternal and immutable invisibility at the foundation of everything that is) cannot be ignored. Or maybe there is an escape, such as the following thesis.

SECTION ONE:

Microscopes

Chapter 1. The state of microscopy

Argument

On the 2nd of January 1665, Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* was still in print when Samuel Pepys caught sight of it during a visit to the local bookseller. Pepys was so impressed by the author's expositions and the virtuosity of his visual representations, that he pre-ordered one copy of the book, which he picked up three weeks later, congratulating himself for the acquisition of that "most excellent piece, of which I am very proud."[1] Pepys' enthusiasm is largely characteristic of the ways in which *Micrographia,* the most important textbook of early microscopy, was received at the time of its publication. However, Hooke's collection of microscopic observations was not the only advocate of the new optical instrument. Before January 1665, Pepys himself had already had significant interaction with the microscope, and his response this time had been far from enthusiastic. Caught by the craze the instrument had generated in London, Pepys had, on Saturday, the 13th of August 1664, bought one such object from Richard Reeve, the foremost instrument maker of the period, and paid for it an exorbitant 5l,10s. Although the instrument had been recommended to him as the best known in England and possibly the best in the world, Pepys spent the whole of Sunday night, accompanied by his wife, frustrated by the difficulty with which the microscope was allowing itself to be properly employed. He even consulted Henry Power's *Experimental Philosophy* (1664), in the hope of finding information about how the instrument was to be operated in order to

[1] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys. Daily Entries from the 17th Century London Diary*, ed. Phil Gyford, after the 1893 edition of Henry B. Whealtey, accessed June 19, 2008, http://www.pepysdiary.com/archive/1665/01/20/index.php.

yield the expected results. The book did not contain such information, and Pepys had to persevere himself. He eventually succeeded, but the results were not up to his expectations.[2]

The history of early microscopy is full of contradictory reactions, enthusiastic accounts of the microscope's abilities alternating with strong criticisms. In England, the primary organization dedicated to the furthering of microscopic observations was the Royal Society. Sworn followers of Francis Bacon's scheme for the advancement of knowledge, its Fellows had found in the microscope a potent ally in the struggle for the promotion of the inductive method. New as an instrument, the microscope was bringing along the necessary support for a new philosophy, the primary aim of which was to reject the commonly shared assumptions of metaphysical philosophy, which seemed to accept with too much ease debatable hypotheses about the visible world. The newness of the instrument served very well the newness of natural philosophy, as it could provide necessary factual evidence in support of the claims against the supposition that Creation was limited to what could be seen with the naked eye, and that its substance could be deducted only through processes of reasoning.

In this environment of intellectual effervescence, three of the many early scientists interested in microscopy stand out as significant figures: Henry Power (1623-1668), Robert Hooke (1635-1703), and Antoni van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723).

Henry Power, by most forgotten in his quality as the first English author of a microscopical treatise, *Experimental Philosophy* (1644), was a graduate of Christ's College at Cambridge (1655), where he was trained as a physician in the Platonist environment that dominated the university at the time. He also invested in Cartesian corpuscularianism, from which, however, he did not retain the purely mechanical explanations of living structures.[3] He combined other precepts of Descartes' philosophy with Cambridge Platonism, as well as with the Baconianism expounded by Robert Boyle ("who probably had the greatest single influence on Power's work from 1660 onwards"), and thus acquired a mixed foundation for his style of natural philosophy.[4] After graduation, Power established a practice in Halifax, where he had attended school, and where he created a circle of natural philosophy enthusiasts. He was closely related to Sir Thomas Browne, his mentor and friend, who encouraged him to pursue his interest in things outside pure

[2] Ibid., http://www.pepysdiary.com/archive/1664/08/14/.
[3] C. Webster, "Henry Power's Experimental Philosophy," *Ambix* 14 (1967): 178.
[4] Ibid., 157.

medicine (anatomy, biology, chemistry).[5] On the 26th of February 1661/1662, he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society, the same day in which the Society had received from him "a paper containing some experiments of his relating to the rise of water in small tubes."[6] His collaboration with the Society lasted until his death, in 1668, four years after the publication of the only work ever printed under his name: the *Experimental Philosophy.* Power's interest in microscopes emerged from the scientific activities conducted by him and his associates in Halifax. He spent considerable amounts of money to purchase optical instruments from Richard Reeve, the London instrument maker.[7] His book, in which microscopical experiments represent only the first (and most substantial) part, seems to have been finished by 1661, but was published four years later, probably as a result of his first visits to the Royal Society, in 1663.[8] The printing of Hooke's *Micrographia* a year and a half afterwards took the lustre away from Power's work, which has not been very favourably regarded ever since. In fact, as Webster pointed out,

> Miscroscopy was not his strongest interest and his microscopical observations are not of great significance. Indeed, many of his observations could have been made without the assistance of optical aids, and many others were borrowed from earlier writers. The essential characteristic of his microscopy is constant reference to more general problems of biology and natural philosophy.[9]

However, Power deserves to be mentioned in any history of early modern microscopy, for his vivid descriptions, and for the effort which he put into a yet inexistent discipline, even if one would concede that he often "concluded more than he saw."[10]

Unlike Power, Robert Hooke dominated by far the scene of English microscopy from the publication of his *Micrographia* in 1665 and until as late as the second half of the eighteenth century. Elected curator of experiments at the Royal Society on November 12th 1662, Hooke had the repositories of the Society at his discretion to conduct experiments of an incredible variety. His first commission (which was discussed prior to his introduction to the Society) mentioned the performance of three or four

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[5] Thomas Cowles, "Dr. Henry Power, Disciple of Sir Thomas Browne," *Isis* 20, no. 2 (Jan. 1934): 346.
[6] Thomas Birch, *The History of the Royal Society of London for Improving of Natural Knowledge, From Its First Rise,* Vol. I (London: printed for A. Millar, 1761), 77.
[7] Webster, "Henry Power's Experimental Philosophy," 158.
[8] Cowles, "Dr. Henry Power," 351.
[9] Webster, "Henry Power's Experimental Philosophy," 163.
[10] Wilson, The Invisible World, 116.

demonstrations at every meeting of the Fellows.[11] His career as a scientist is best summarized by Lisa Jardine:

> In the second half of the seventeenth century, Hooke's name crops up everywhere where new science was being undertaken and specialist equipment was required. He masterminded the technology behind a string of scientific 'discoveries' at the Royal Society. He could solve almost any technical problem involving scientific instruments at the drop of a hat.[12]

In microscopy, Hooke's name is associated with the construction of one of the first English compound microscopes, which he described in *Micrographia* in great detail. His book was published at the request of the Royal Society, in preparation for the announced visit of Charles II, who had shown some interest (never materialized) in visiting Gresham College, where the Fellows' weekly meetings took place. Thomas Birch's record for Monday, 6th of July 1663, shows that "Mr. Hooke was charged to shew his microscopical observations in a handsome book," to be presented in the anticipated meeting, for which he was also requested to conduct an impressive array of experiments concerning the air pump, as well as his own hygroscope, "made of the beard of a wild oat" (later included in *Micrographia,* 147-152).[13] By this date, Hooke had already gained his repute for the interest in pursuing microscopical experiments, which he had started as early as 1656, when he resided in Oxford.[14] Containing 57 microscopical observations and three more made by means of a telescope, *Micrographia* is also endowed with 38 plates representing drawings made by Hooke himself (although Catherine Wilson suggests that they may have been executed by Christopher Wren, who had been the one to start microscopical observations on behalf of the Royal Society).[15] It is thanks to these drawings that his treatise managed to quickly overshadow Power's *Experimental Philosophy*, which had only three ill-drawn and unimpressive visual aids to accompany the text. Hooke had the same advantage over Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, whose letters were often accompanied by drawings which, however, were not his own creations, but had been commissioned to various Dutch artists in his entourage.

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[11] Birch, *History I*, 124.

[12] Lisa Jardine, *Ingenious Pursuits. Building the Scientific Revolution* (London: Little, Brown and Co., 1999), 50.

[13] Birch, *History I*, 272.

[14] Stephen Inwood, *The man who knew too much: The strange and inventive life of Robert Hooke, 1635-1703* (London: Macmillan, 2002), 61.

[15] Wilson, *The Invisible World,* 85.

Hooke's worth as a microscopist is often highlighted by scholars of the discipline. S. Bradbury, who has a word to say about every person who put their hands upon an optical instrument in the period, says, at some point, that "the tremendous interest in microscopy at the end of the seventeenth and in the early eighteenth centuries was stimulated to a large degree by Hooke's *Micrographia*."[16]

The same influence was exercised over the incipient science of microscopy by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, a draper from Delft who, apparently after having visited London and read Hooke's treatise[17] (although Edward G. Ruestow thinks that the reason behind his turn towards microscopy "remains a puzzle"), decided to dedicate the rest of his life to the employment of the new instrument.[18] He had his first letter published in the *Philosophical Transactions* in 1673, after having been introduced to the Royal Society by Regnier de Graaf, the Dutch anatomist who corresponded frequently with the Society, and who recommended him for the exceptional quality of his home-made instruments.[19] Van Leeuwenhoek was created a Fellow in 1670, and kept a long and regular correspondence with the Society until shortly before his death. What made him intriguing to all who read his letters was his unrivalled skill in grinding glasses for his single-lens microscopes, of which he created an impressive number during his career. The Royal Society, remarking the high quality of his observations, was very quick to employ him, but encountered a stubborn van Leeuwenhoek, who never agreed to impart the secret of his techniques. He is said to have refused a German visitor's plea by explaining that the access of others to his best performing instruments would make him "a slave to the whole world."[20] The mystery could not be solved even by the employment of what seems to have been a spy: Thomas Molyneux, an Irish doctor, brother to William Molyneux, famous for the problem of the blind man restored to sight, which sparked a debate that engaged, at the end of the century, figures such as Locke and Berkeley (of them, later in the present section of the thesis). Molyneux visited van Leeuwenhoek in 1685, after which he addressed a letter to Francis Aston, then secretary of the Society, in which he described some of the instruments seen by him in the laboratory of "Mynheer

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[16] S. Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1968), 58.
[17] Jardine, *Ingenious Pursuits*, 91-92.
[18] Edward G. Ruestow, *The Microscope in the Dutch Republic. The Shaping of Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 147.
[19] Antoni van Leeuwenhoek and Regnier de Graaf, "A Specimen of some Observations made by a Microscope, contrived by M. Leewenhoeck in Holland, lately communicated by Dr. Regnerus de Graaf," *Philosophical Transactions* 8 (1673): 6037-6038.
[20] Wilson, The Invisible World, 92.

Leewenhoeck." The letter says that the microscopes which van Leeuwenhoek allowed others to see were not of great magnifying powers, but that "he told me that he had another sort, which no man living had looked through setting aside himself." These, the Dutch refused to show Molyneux. That the visit had been commissioned by the Royal Society becomes evident in the end of the letter, where Molyneux wrote: "You see, Sir, how freely I give you my thoughts of him, because you desire it."[21] No matter how hard it was desired by the secretary of the Royal Society (an institution which, regardless of his opaqueness, ended up being "the most significant and enduring of Leeuwenhoek's scientific relationships")[22], and by all who preceded and succeeded him, van Leeuwenhoek remained his entire life "guarded in the amount of detail he was prepare to go into in describing the equipment and techniques he used."[23]

Power, Hooke, and van Leeuwenhoek form, together, a trio of microscope users on whom the very foundation of the discipline was built at the end of the seventeenth century. To them could be added the names of Marcello Malpighi (1628-1694) and Nehemiah Grew (1641-1712), both Fellows of the Royal Society, both major figures in the history of microscopy, but who had more specialised views and, therefore, did not contribute to the same extent to the consolidation of what was, at the time, a science in the making. The three form the basis of my discussion on the fate of the discipline throughout the period under consideration, since their work (especially that of Hooke and van Leeuwenhoek) was often mentioned by later microscopists, who always acknowledged the contribution of their predecessors. The following chapter also includes references to a number of English microscopists of the eighteenth century, generally considered to be the followers of the above mentioned trio.

On the foundation of these historical accounts, blended with observations on epistemological issues raised by practitioners of microscopy (especially the difference between object and specimen), I will build a further discussion, the purpose of which is to outline a social and cultural category that dominated the scene of science in the early modern period: the virtuosi. Grown out of the curiosity generated by the inductive philosophy of Francis Bacon, yet unable to raise themselves to genuine scientific principles ("But the method of learning from experience in current use is blind and silly,"

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[21] Thomas Molyneux, "A letter of Mr. Thomas Molyneux to Mr. Aston," in *The History of the Royal Society of London, for the Improving of Natural Knowledge, From Its First Rise,* by Thomas Birch (London: printed for A. Miller, 1757), vol. IV, 366.
[22] Ruestow, *The Microscope in the Dutch Republic,* 149.
[23] Jardine, *Ingenious Pursuits,* 93.

a thing that changed little since Bacon's admonition)[24], these bubbly amateurs contributed to the spread of the kind of knowledge championed by the Royal Society, thus adding significantly not only to the shape and consistency of common practices but also to the instruments used in order to perform them. The virtuosi were the butt of jokes and ridicule thrown upon early modern sciences for reasons to do with mismanagement of time, misdirection of attention, or conducting of unprofitable experiments. As Michael Hunter indicates, these lay labourers were ubiquitous figures in the landscape of science, present in the most unexpected of places, showing interest in the most unusual of disciplines, and employing their time and energy to initiate the most outrageous of enterprises. In fact, Hunter argues, "serious scientists could not escape their association with the virtuosi even if they wanted to [...]. Besides their role as Baconian collectors and arbiters, the virtuosi provided the staple attendance and finance on which a formal body like the Royal Society depended."[25]

The virtuosi brought with them a penchant for the invisible, which formed a scientific, as well as a social estimation of distinction, heavily employed in order to set them apart from society. With this tendency came about a type of microscopical experience which rested on a particular kind of theatricality, according to which specimens were seen as if completely separated from the observers who handled them, pursuing their natural destinies and remaining entirely exterior to and unconcerned about the experiment performed on them. And to top up the entire discussion, the section will be finished with reflections on the early microscopists' talent in beautifying and enhancing their specimens, in order to create artefacts able to raise the prestige of their discipline above the somewhat malicious labels created by their critics.

[24] Bacon, *Novum Organum,* 78.

[25] Michael Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 68.

Annoying aberrations

Trustworthiness in scientific methodology is assured by the ability to produce data which, when replicated, do not alter the familiarity of the object. This, of course, is the great limitation of science in general, and of microscopy in particular. The fact that seventeenth-century microscopists repeated their experiments several times, or that they re-read the results of others' experiments, is proof that they were already aware that the microscope was insufficiently equipped to label the acquired information as stable.

Work with microscopes was, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a continuous struggle against the so-called 'optical aberrations.' These technical imperfections are caused by the same major property of light: the fact that it bends at its passing from one medium to another. Spherical aberration is caused by the fact that the rays that strike the lens are bent at different angles, which impedes their meeting into the same point behind the lens. More precisely, in a bi-convex lens those beams that touch on the margins of the lens are bent more strongly than those that strike it closer to its centre. The immediate effect is an inconveniently blurred image.

In chromatic aberration, the problem is caused by the different wavelength of the colours that form white light. At the passing through transparent media, such as lenses, white light decomposes into its constitutive parts, that is, the colours of the light spectrum, which have different refractive angles, according to their wavelength. The shorter ones, such as blue, are more strongly bent, and therefore focus much closer to the lens, while the long ones, such as red, are focused farther from it. This produces a number of different foci, which makes the eye perceive fringes of colours around the image.

Due to the absence of a proper technology for the grinding of lenses, early microscopists were forced to become themselves instrument makers. Hooke boasted about his invention, a machine which promised to grind identical lenses, in the hope of acquiring repeatable images. However, his invention does not seem to have worked. As he himself testifies, "there may be perhaps ten [lenses] wrought before one be made

tolerably good, and most of those ten perhaps every one differing in goodness one from another, which is an Argument, that the way hitherto used is, at least, very uncertain."[26]

The accuracy of lenses remained, therefore, a serious problem throughout the early history of microscopy. Examining van Leeuwenhoek's instruments, Brian J. Ford came to the realization that the Dutch microscopist was no stranger to the problem of repeatability. The conclusion that "two lenses of similar theoretical performance can provide images of widely differing quality" may also explain why van Leeuwenhoek manufactured hundreds of instruments throughout his lifetime, most of them meant for specific, often unique, specimens.[27] And "because no two lenses were identical, each optical instrument was unique" too.[28] It follows, obviously, that each object was also uniquely attained, and that in many cases the intended object could be easily mistaken for a variety of other things. Many and dangerous are the perils of such visual observations, as exemplified by Hooke, who admitted, in one situation, that

> the Eyes of a Fly in one kind of light appear almost like a Lattice, drill'd through with abundance of small holes […] In the Sunshine they look like a Surface cover'd with golden Nails; in another posture, like a Surface cover'd with Pyramids; in another with Cones; and in other Postures of quite other shape; but that which exhibits the best, is the Light collected on the Object, by those means I have already described.[29]

This passage makes very clear the actual course of the experiment. The eye of the fly, which is the object the experimenter wants to arrive at, is already known; it is axiomatically established as the *telos* of the entire demonstration. This explains the frustration of not being able to see the obvious (the already known), due to shortcomings of the instrument which, instead of facilitating the process whereby the object was to be revealed, complicated it unnecessarily and confused the viewer. I will expand on this topic later in the present section, when I will turn my attention to the difference between

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[26] Robert Hooke, *Micrographia: Or Some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies Made by Magnifying Glasses. With Observations and Inquiries thereupon* (London: printed by Jo. Martyn and Ja. Allestry, 1665), facsimile reprint (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), sig. d1v.
[27] Brian J. Ford, "The van Leeuwenhoek Specimens," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 36, no. 1 (1981): 45.
[28] Michael Aaron Dennis, "Graphic Understanding: Instruments and Interpretation in Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*," *Science in Context* 3, no. 2 (1989): 322.
[29] Hooke, *Micrographia,* sig. f1v. The method Hooke is referring to consists of the concentration of light upon the object by means of a glass balloon or an inflated bladder filled with brine, which presents the advantage of increasing the amount of light cast upon the object.

microscopical object and microscopical specimen, on which I think the entire epistemology of microscopy rests.

Newton, who had, as early as 1665, discovered that the cause of chromatic aberration was the non-homogenous nature of light, which was made up of rays of different colours and different degrees of refraction, missed, however, the possibility of correcting this aberration, which he ended up declaring to be an insurmountable problem.[30] His mistake had consisted of assuming, after insufficient experimentation with his prisms, that all media produced spectra of equal length. This assumption was going to be revisited by mid-eighteenth-century optical scientists, who proved that different transparent materials have different indices of refrangibility, which, when combined, could work well towards counteracting chromatic aberration.

Apart from lenses, microscopic experiments also depended on the quality of light, which raised different sets of problems, related to the ways in which light could be captured and directed to the microscopic object. Hooke's accounts highlight the empirical ways in which early microscopists were trying to overcome the difficulties of acquiring the right type of light. His description is very detailed:

> I make choice of some Room that has only one window open to the South, and at about three or four foot distance from this Window, on a Table, I place my *Microscope*, and then so place either a round Globe of Water, or a very deep clear *plano convex* Glass (whose convex side is turn'd towards the Window) that there is a great quantity of Rayes collected and thrown upon the Object: Or if the Sun shine, I place a small piece of oyly Paper very near the Object, between that and the light; then with a good large Burning-Glass I so collect and throw the Rayes on the Paper, that there may be a very great quantity of light pass through it to the Object.[31]

The need for careful preparations of this type is indicative of the limited applicability of microscopes. Take the above provisions out of the process and the experiment no longer stands on firm grounds. In fact, it is no longer possible. Thus, records of microscopic observations often become records of the obstacles encountered by the experimenter. And it is surprising to find how diverse and often unexpected such obstacles were. James Wilson, early-eighteenth century London instrument maker whose name was frequently present in the pages of the *Philosophical Transactions*, gave, at some point, an account of his pocket microscopes, on which occasion he warned the readers that

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[30] R. H. Curtiss, "Isaac Newton and his work in astronomy and optics," *Popular Astronomy* 35, no. 5 (June-July 1927): 305-306.
[31] Hooke, *Micrographia*, sig. d1v.

> in the viewing of Objects, one ought to be careful not to hinder the Light from falling on Them, by the Hat, Perruke, or any other thing, especially when they are to look upon Opake Objects: for nothing can be seen with the best Glasses, unless the Object be in a due distance, with a sufficient light.[32]

Such precautions render obvious the need of the experimenter to discipline the environment in which the observation was to take place. Extensions of the experimenter's body (hats, wigs and other such objects) are to be eliminated from the scene, in order for the 'confrontation' between the subject observer and the specimen to be properly performed.

The eighteenth century

After its explosive beginnings, the microscope gradually lost its appeal among scientists, due to the little improvement made with regards to the corrections of optical aberrations and the improvement of lens performance. As noted by historians of microscopy, "between 1670 and 1750 the performance of both the simple and compound microscopes did not improve to any great extent."[33] Although the ability to reveal details invisible to the naked eye had been fully acknowledged, the microscope, with its unrepeatability, did not entirely match the scientific agenda, which was requiring serialized representations and stable images. The immediate effect was, obviously, the realization that the imperfect microscope could "throw not only it, but also its users and their discoveries, into disrepute."[34] Often, preference turned from the cumbersome compound microscopes, with their irritating limitations with regards to management of light, to the transportable and easily manoeuvrable simple, or single-lens microscope, which gradually "became the dominant apparatus for instruction, demonstration, and

[32] Quoted in S. Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope*, 94.
[33] Marian Fournier, *The Fabric of Life. Microscopy in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 14.
[34] S. Bradbury, "The Quality of the Image produced by the Compound Microscope: 1700-1840," *Historical Aspects of Microscopy,* ed. S. Bradbury and G. L'E. Turner (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1967): 152.

recreation for the better part of the eighteenth century."[35] Although it was not free from its own problems to do with limiting the amount of light passing between the lens and the specimen, at least this type presented the advantage of portability, and did not confine the observer into the precincts of a laboratory. This is why the simple microscope was met with such an enthusiasm among non-professional users, and why portable instruments became the hype of popular entertainment.

Moreover, in the absence of proper technologies for the grinding of optical lenses, the improvements made to the microscope throughout the eighteenth century were invariably concentrated on its mechanical parts. "Such optical changes as were made appeared to be random and purposeless," S. Bradbury shows, stressing that this was due to the "lack of basic theoretical and applied knowledge of optics." But at the same time, when shifting focus to the mechanical aspects of the instrument, Bradbury declares that "the pattern of the microscope stand, focusing mechanisms and specimen-holding devices became established and carried to a high degree of proficiency."[36] Hooke, for instance, devised a revolutionary stand for his compound microscope, consisting of a single pillar. This was rapidly embraced as a manifest upgrading of the bulky tripod used in previous models to support the cylinder of the microscope, which was irremediably immobile and only permitted one stage of focalization, by screwing up and down the extensible tube, to reach the convenient position. In Hooke's version, focalization could be done in two stages: a general one was done by lowering the tube along the brass pillar that supported it, while fine adjustments were made by screwing the tube in search for the clearest image.[37] Hooke is also credited with the invention of a new type of joint, the so called 'ball-and-socket joint,' which he used in a variety of situations. In the case of his microscope, the ball-and-socket solution permitted rotation of the tube around an axis, which presented the immense advantage of allowing examination of the specimen from a multitude of perspectives, ability absent in tripod microscopes.

In order to make microscopic observations possible, early microscopists were in constant search for light, placing their instruments wherever such light was available, or bringing about sources of artificial illumination, such as candles and lamps. Around 1712, Edmund Culpeper, who had returned to the tripod model but improved it considerably

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[35] Stafford, *Body Criticism,* 346.
[36] Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope,* 57.
[37] In the preface to *Micrographia,* Hooke gave a detailed account of how his microscope worked, the solutions he found to the mostly mechanical problems encountered, and accompanied this description with expressive and easy to follow drawings.

(which made it "the dominant model during the first half of the eighteenth century")[38], also initiated the use of transmitted light by means of a substage mirror. This was placed under the microscope's slate, where it could collect and reflect light back to the stage, thus illuminating the (transparent) object from below.[39]

In the case of the hand-held single-lens microscope, improvements were also made in the mechanical department only, the efforts concentrating mostly on the addition of devices which could help fixing the microscope to the edge of a table. This freed the experimenter's hands, and also improved the ability to receive steady images.[40]

In spite of all this progress, little improvements of the key microtechniques will be registered from the publication of Hooke's *Micrographia* until mid-eighteenth century, when "introduction to microscopic science for the layman became popular."[41] With this major swing from professional audiences to untrained amateurs, another shift became apparent: from a purely scientific interest to a preponderantly entertainment-oriented crave for the marvels promised by optical instruments. As pointed out by S. Bradbury, "towards the beginning of the eighteenth century it was a status symbol to possess a microscope and be able to demonstrate with it the structures of insects, flowers, and other natural objects."[42] Ownership filtered through class distinction boosted up the evolution of the microscope in a direction that regarded science as fashionable. Having microscopes was equated with having what it takes to show off on the social scene. "What better manifestation of refined taste than connoisseurship of subtleties that escape the naked eye?"[43] But these kinds of notices and employments were prone to draw attention to other inconveniences of the instrument, which earlier microscopists had dealt with as matters of scientific concern. Unlike his predecessors, Henry Baker, for instance, insisted on highlighting the well-known fact about compound microscopes that they rendered inverted images of the object, unlike the simple microscopes, which were faithful to the object's position. The inversion applies to all the details of the object under examination:

> [T]he top of the Object appears at Bottom, the Right-side on the Left, and every Part in the Place most opposite to its natural and true Position: The

[38] Fournier, *The Fabric of Life,* 46.
[39] Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope,* 108-109.
[40] Fournier, *The Fabric of Life,* 19-24.
[41] Ibid., 34.
[42] Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope,* 104.
[43] Olivier, "Binding the book of nature," 187.

> Lights and Shades being also inverted, the sinking parts appear to rise, and the rising parts to sink in.[44]

Whereas observations of the shortcomings had been previously made in a more veiled way, as if the experimenters were embarrassed by the impotence of their optical instruments, such declarations were now more openly spoken, with less care for the microscope's respectability. This suggests that the microscope had reached, by this time, a certain stage of maturity, when its deficiencies were readily known by everybody and therefore taken as commonsense.

Another important transformation is that the emphasis was now shifted from manufacturers to users. Whereas treatises such as Hooke's had envisaged an audience presumably interested in the technology of fabrication of instruments (since the Royal Society heard not only experiments, but also demonstrations involving scientific apparatuses, especially when these were new), now the stress was on individuals who bore no interest in the technological part, but only aimed at the pleasure of easy observation. Baker found no embarrassment in highlighting that

> As my Desire, is to make People sensible of the Pleasure and Information the Microscope can afford, and instruct them how to manage and understand it, rather than how to make it, I shall take up none of their Time with the Manner of melting, grinding, polishing, or setting of Glasses; a Work very few of my Readers will ever trouble themselves about.[45]

The simple, unengaged pleasures facilitated by the microscope had already been frowned upon by Hooke who, in his *Cutlerian Lectures* of 1691/92, had protested against the fact that microscopes had been turned into instruments for "Diversion and Passtime," and that Antoni van Leeuwenhoek was the only one who was still performing microscopic observations based on a purely scientific agenda.[46]

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[44] Henry Baker, *The Microscope Made Easy* (London: 1743), 2.
[45] Baker, *The Microscope Made Easy,* 3.
[46] Robert Hooke, *Philosophical Experiments and Observations* (London: 1726), ed. W. Derham, facsimile reprint (London: Cass, 1967): 261.

Because convex lenses work best by reducing the distance where focus takes place, it follows that the smaller a lens and the more curved, the greater the magnification will be. This explains why single-lens microscopes are capable of returning a larger image of the object. Such lenses have to be extremely small, sometimes the size of a grain of sand, and their grinding is extremely difficult. This is why Antoni van Leeuwenhoek was received with so much enthusiasm by the Royal Society when he came up with his recipe of blown glass, which was shaped as small droplets mounted between two copper plates. The simple, one-lens microscopes, manufactured after his recipe were not only more efficient in magnifying objects, they were also extremely easy to manoeuvre, one such instrument fitting very well into one's palm. However, their small size represented their major shortcoming too, as minuscule glasses would allow very little light to pass through in order to meet the eye of the observer. Therefore, images obtained by single-lens microscopes were greatly affected by dark shadows surrounding the specimen, and a fragmentation of the object, which could not fit entirely into the small aperture. In order to get a good image, one had to bring oneself very close to the lens, which translated into an inconvenient straining of the eye. Such faults caused Henry Baker to assert that the power of magnification of simple microscopes "is rather apt to produce Error than discover Truth," a reason why, in 1743, when Baker was writing this sentence, compound microscopes were still considered preferable to the cheaper and more easily manoeuvrable microscopes of the kind used by van Leeuwenhoek.[47]

Extensively concerned with the development of microscopes made for leisure rather than intellectual pursuit, the eighteenth-century microscopists and instrument makers did all their best to anticipate the growing interest in this form of visual entertainment which was gradually becoming cheaper and more readily available to large audiences. The Wilson microscope came as an answer to the need for portable microscopes. In an article in the *Philosophical Transactions*, James Wilson popularized this model, described earlier by the Dutch optician Nicolas Hartsoeker in his *Essay de Dioptrique* (1694) but never pursued

[47] Baker, *The Microscope Made Easy,* 6. It must also be added that van Leeuwenhoek was the only microscopist in the history of science who used only single-lens microscopes in his observations. Others employed both simple and compound models, according to the need of their experiment: a single-lens when magnification was desired, and a compound when what was being sought for was clarity.

by him into fabrication. It was a so-called screw-barrel microscope, in which a small cylinder with an external thread was screwed into another cylinder, in order to compress a spring whose purpose was to adjust focalization. Like all single lens microscopes, this was extremely small and portable, which made it perfect for botanists and other scientists doing field work. Some models were supplied with ivory handles, which made manipulation even easier. The reduced size of the Wilson microscope and its compact structure made it extremely popular throughout the eighteenth century; so much so that, when, towards the end of the century, the solar microscope was being put to work, the Wilson type provided the optics for the apparatus.[48]

In his *Micrographia Illustrata* (1746), a reevaluation of Hooke's *Micrographia*, George Adams, a London instrument maker who was aiming at covering the entire spectrum of the market, vociferously advertises a "New Universal Single Microscope" and a "New Universal Double Microscope" of his own making.[49] As the titles suggest, what was aimed for was a series of user-friendly instruments capable of a multitude of operations and of various powers of magnification, which could perform as well as professional microscopes.

The universality of these kinds of microscopes is even more explicitly expounded by Benjamin Martin who, around 1765, was promoting his "New Universal Microscope, Which Has All the Uses of the Single, Opake, and Aquatic Microscopes." The 'Advertisement' that preceded the brief description boasted that Martin's microscopes "are the best and most commodious for general Use of any we can at present think of, and much exceed any we have made or published before."[50] The text also promised that objects 1/500 of an inch in size could be made visible by means of this universal microscope, and that magnification could reach up to 5760 times the original size.

However spectacular it may have been, with its multitude of lenses and focusing devices, Martin's microscope was not far from the uncertainties of earlier microscopes, which could not afford an exact calculation of the focusing point. As the author confessed, "nothing has been said of the Magnifying Powers by the different Object

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[48] The solar microscope was in fact an application of the Wilson microscope to the principles of *camera obscura*: projection of an external image onto the wall of a dark room, through a small aperture in the wall opposite to it. Thus, the contemplation of the microscopic image could be done by a large number of people: typical of the eighteenth-century concern with public entertainment and spectacle.

[49] George Adams, *Micrographia Illustrata, or, The Knowledge of the Microscope Explain'd* (London: 1746).

[50] Benjamin Martin, *The description of a new universal microscope, which has all the uses of the single, compound, and aquatic microscopes* (London: 1765?): sig. A2.

Lenses of the Microscope, it being a matter of great uncertainty, unless the focal Distances of each could be very well determined, which cannot be done with any Precision but by a *Micrometer*."[51] This small detail, hidden in the last sentences of the brief publication, highlights the fact that Martin's microscope was not intended for an expert audience, which would have needed a micrometer to establish the focus. Instead, he relied on inexperienced buyers, for whom technical details were not important.

In another place, Martin also acknowledged that "to pretend to make a Field without any Confusion, Distortion, or Colours in the extreme Parts, when clear in the Middle, must bewray great Ignorance in Theory, and want of Experience in the *Microscopic Praxis*."[52] A statement of this kind was meant to appease the concerned users of his instruments, who he very significantly calls "Lover[s] of Optical Amusement."[53]

It is important to note in relation to Benjamin Martin that, in making his telescopes and microscopes, he started using the so-called achromats, which had been introduced around 1750 by the English optician John Dollond, who managed to correct Newton's mistake with regards to chromatic aberrations.[54] These were composite lenses made of glasses of different refractive powers, glued together in order to cancel out each other's imperfections, and focus two wavelengths in the same place, thus sharpening the image. The full use of achromatic lenses, which also needed to be improved, was, however, generalized only around late 1830s, when all the troubles of the science of microscopy started fading away, and when the interest in the instrument was renewed.[55]

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[51] Ibid., 14-15.
[52] Benjamin Martin, *An essay on the genuine construction of a standard microscope and telescope* (London: 1776), 6.
[53] Ibid., 8.
[54] Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope,* 177.
[55] Ibid., 200.

The process of instrumentalization that brought forth microscopy was a double-edged sword, which tended to confuse the reception of the new inductivist epistemology, the aim of which was to bring forth certitude and to eliminate doubt in regards to nature's hidden secrets. On the one hand, the use of microscopes stressed the fallibility of human senses, which could not be counted on to acquire trustworthy data from the surrounding world. Moreover, human sensorium was not properly equipped to perceive a level of reality which could only be materialized by means of instrumental prosthetics. On the other hand, though, as shown above, when it came to instrumental inadequacies experimental philosophers turned to blaming lenses for the inaccuracy of representations. In doing so, the stress was moved back to the human individual, who was the only one capable of discerning truth from appearance. Of course, the question that imposed itself was: how was it possible for a being endowed with limited or unreliable senses to perceive Creation for what it truly was? An extended debate of this type had dominated the scene of Christian theology for centuries, and the experimental sciences of the late seventeenth century managed to rekindle those old animosities. Peter Harrison, in his *The Fall of Man and the Foundation of Science,* has shown that, on the philosophic-religious field, the problem of man's fall from grace was met with dual approach. On the one hand, the problem was met with the Augustinian credo that "without direct assistance, human beings can know nothing."[56] On the other hand, at the exact opposite of St. Augustine's epistemology, lies that of Thomas Aquinas, who "had learnt from Aristotle that the acquisition of knowledge was a mundane process that required no supernatural intervention."[57] Thus, while agreeing upon the fundamental truth that humans are fallen creatures denied divine wisdom, the two differed on grounds that, ultimately, regard scientific knowledge as possible or impossible. Of the two, Aquinas is the logical supporter of the epistemology of sciences, since he "was led to the conclusion that our natural orientation towards the sensory world was not an indication of our fallen state as Augustine had thought, but was the natural state of affairs ordained by God."[58] Through

[56] Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundation of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39.
[57] Ibid., 42.
[58] Ibid., 45.

the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Protestant reconsideration of the possibility to know, based on self-assessment, predestination, and acknowledgement of mundane vocation, the doors were opened again to sciences. Summarized by Harrison: "If the scriptures teach us that we are fallen creatures, science can assist us in assessing the extent of our losses and in setting the appropriate limits to our knowledge," a perspective "consistent with the widespread early modern view that human learning can play a positive role in reversing the losses of Adam's lapse."[59] Bacon, who came as a late instantiation of the Aquinian optimism with regards to restoration of pre-Adamic knowledge, insisted that nature, in its refinement, could be known only if man understood first and foremost his own limitations, an enterprise made possible by improving the functioning of senses, memory and reason. "The subtlety of Nature," he declared in the 10th aphorism of the *Novum Organum*, "is far greater than that of the sense and the understanding, so that all our beautiful speculations and guesses and controversies are absurd, only there is no one at hand to observer this fact."[60] Identifying places in *Micrographia* where similar references are made to the improvements of the tripartite attributes of the human intellect ("The only way which now remains for us to recover some degree of those former perfections, seems to be, by rectifying the operations of the Sense, the Memory, and Reason"),[61] Harrison sees in Hooke "the most clear and concise account of the Baconian understanding of the relation between experimental natural philosophy and the fallen condition of human beings."[62]

Yet in spite of the declared attachment to the philosophical desideratum of the conquest of nature by means of reason, *Micrographia* is for the greatest part concerned with issues of the senses. The instrument used to ease man's way into the invisibilia offers, to Hooke, the possibility of arriving at secrets of nature which "our unassisted senses are not able to perceive."[63] Although never completely divorced, insistence upon the limits of human senses will leave the foreground of public debate only in mid-nineteenth century, when significant technological developments permitted the eradication of optical aberrations, and when, as a consequence, "senses turned from auxiliary tools of the mind to conditions of the objects of research."[64]

[59] Ibid., 99.
[60] Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 45.
[61] Hooke, "The Preface," in *Micrographia*, n.p.
[62] Harrison, *The Fall of Man*, 199.
[63] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 162.
[64] Jutta Schickore, *The Microscope and the Eye. A History of Reflections, 1740-1870* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 5.

But in the age of Hooke, Power, and van Leeuwenhoek we are at the beginnings of microscopy, and questions about the reliability of the observer were not yet convincingly asked. Instead, while agreeing upon numerous faults of the instrument, early microscopists behaved like narcissistic figures, for whom self-criticism was rarely an epistemological option. As Lorraine Daston has put it, "in the painstaking observations of the naturalists, the argument from design became less an argument from evidence than an experience of self-evidence."[65] Stimulated by the novelty of their pursuits and by the enthusiasm with which developments were being received in the public field, proto-scientists such as Hooke, and later Wilson, or Benjamin Martin, were boastful individuals working not just towards advertising their optical instruments, but also towards self-promotion. Their dreams made sense, because they were (some, not all) people of the lower classes. To them, the high social status of the rich virtuosi was a barrier to cross. A man like Hooke, who lived in a medium dominated by these moneyed amateurs who often belittled him on account of his physical disabilities, could only take his revenge by constructing a strong identity as a scientist. Michael Aaron Dennis points out the fact that Hooke was visibly treated in a discriminatory manner, the way he was addressed (by being "ordered" to perform experiments) differing obviously from the way in which Robert Boyle was treated (by being "requested" to do the same, and take his time).[66] There was a class imbalance that Hooke needed to reconfigure. And indeed, he has been counted lately (in hindsight, of course) among the few genuine scientists of the period, when the wellbeing of the Royal Society (largely ignored as an organization and even mocked by Charles II, on whom all hopes rested for a period) depended exclusively on members' financial contributions and their willingness to invest often unpaid efforts.

With the microscopists of the eighteenth century, narcissism took on a different aspect. Baker, Adams, Wilson, and Martin were all men of business, who ran their own shops and who depended on their persuasive abilities in order to make a living. Advertisement was the perfect tool for their purposes, and as advertising is about self-praise, the nature of these texts took this peculiar shape of boastful self-aggrandizement. The purpose, however, was not only to warm up the spirit of these manufacturers, but also to enlarge the legions of their readership. Reading a treatise or a simple advertisement was equated to witnessing the unfolding of an experiment.

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[65] Lorraine Daston, "Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment," *The Moral Authority of Nature*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 101.
[66] Aaron, "Graphic Understanding," 315.

Witnesses to science were key to the success of any scientific enterprise. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer have asked the crucial question about the manner in which consumers of new sciences in the seventeenth century could be made to bring their contribution to the expansion of knowledge. The answer is: through "voluntary giving of assent to matters of fact."[67] The two have argued that witnessing "traversed the social and moral accounting system of Restoration England," which made it perhaps the most compelling method of knowledge dissemination. And, like Foucault's power state, which inculcates into its subjects the operating features of the discourse and make them replicate those features through their own actions, so do Shapin and Schaffer conceive of what they call "virtual witnessing" as a technology of the self that allowed early scientific amateurs to replicate the truth of the experiments and thus consolidate the epistemic value of that truth.

> The technology of virtual witnessing involves the production in a *reader*'s mind of such an image of an experimental scene as obviates the necessity for either direct witness or replication. Through virtual witnessing the multiplication of witnesses could be, in principle, unlimited. It was therefore the most powerful technology for constituting matters of fact. The validation of experiments, and the crediting of their outcomes as matters of fact, necessarily entailed their realization in the laboratory of the mind and the mind's eye. What was required was a technology of trust and assurance that the things had been done and done in the way claimed.[68]

This trust depended, obviously, on the clarity that an instrument could yield, which was often a problem in itself. Shapin and Schaffer have described various features of the literary technology employed by Robert Boyle (and through him, supposedly, by all early scientists) to consolidate the credibility delivered by his narrative persona. Whether it was through the sobriety and modesty of their narrative voice, through their calculated predilection for recounting errors, or through their unadorned style of presentation, early scientists persuaded their receptive audiences that sentences uttered by them were to be trusted. This may explain the fact that (the short syncope at the end of the seventeenth century apart) microscopes were met with enthusiastic acceptance, in spite of their fundamental flaws, openly admitted. In the observation on the flea, Hooke confessed that, in spite of all its magnifying powers, "the Microscope is able to make no greater

[67] Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump. Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 57.
[68] Ibid., 59, 60.

discoveries of it then [sic] the naked eye."[69] Henry Power too acknowledged that some of the specimens he had examined were so small "that no bristle nor hairs could be discern'd, either because they had none, or else (more probably) because the Glass failed in presenting them."[70] And yet, the microscope made slow but steady progress towards its acceptance, to such an extent that it would become common knowledge and matter of popular entertainment. The popularity of the pocket microscope indicates the extent to which this affordable gadget was gaining terrain, to the prejudice of the heavy compound microscopes, which remained confined to scientific laboratories. With this increased mobility came a form of criticism which regarded facility as a major sign that science had taken a wrong turn. In 1710, Joseph Addison complained that the growing interests in experimental philosophy "make us serious upon Trifles," and concluded that "the Studies of this Nature should be Diversions, Relaxations, and Amusements, not the Care, Business and Concern of Life."[71]

A notable feature at this stage in the history of microscopy is the immense popularity of the instrument among women. Sensitive to the transformations in the scientific market, instrument makers appeased female curiosity with appropriate gadgets. Prompted by their increasingly prosperous trade, they learnt very quickly how to manufacture tiny microscopes worn by the ladies dangling from their bracelets like pieces of jewellery.[72] As pointed out by Marc Olivier, the microscopes of the eighteenth century were in themselves jewels, objects of a value high enough to propagate their users into the heights of respectable hierarchies: "Decorated by skilled goldsmiths and jewellers, the microscope gains social legitimacy and becomes a worthy emblem of a class-based appropriation of nature and knowledge."[73] But it may also be true that these beautiful objects with little optical potency were illustrations of a rigid baroque mode of knowledge dispersion, with its exaggerated ornaments, which concealed a reluctance to part with established ways of representing the world. "The ornate exterior of the device represents the illusory maintenance of an old system that is already dead. The nostalgia-encrusted

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[69] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 210.
[70] Henry Power, *Experimental Philosophy in Three Books, Containing New Experiments Microscopical, Mercurial, Magnetical* (London: printed by T. Roycroft, 1664), 17.
[71] Joseph Addison, *The Tatler* 216 (26 August 1710), 1.
[72] Marjorie Hope Nicholson, "Introduction," in *The Virtuoso*, by Thomas Shadwell, ed. Marjorie Hope Nicholson and David Stuart Rodes (University of Nebraska Press, 1966): p. xx.
[73] Marc Olivier, "Binding the book of nature: Microscopy as literature," *History of European Ideas* 31 (2005): 191.

sculpture absorbs the shock of the new."[74] Often, decorativeness masked problems with manipulation and with the enabling of significant observations. Culpeper microscopes, for instance, with their mahogany and brass ornaments, created "an extremely attractive instrument, although one which was not very practical to use."[75] The taste for gilded instruments of enjoyment, for the exterior to the detriment of the interior, for spectacle rather than performance, was a feature of the class of cultured individuals who took pleasure in manipulating the gadget produced by early-modern science. Of them, in what follows.

The English Virtuoso

Non-professional practitioners of early modern experimental and natural philosophies, known under the name of *virtuosi*, were met with feelings that mirrored the reception of the instruments they were making use of. A strong wave of criticism in their direction was primarily aimed against aspects related to time management, utility, and profitability. The Royal Society, the major venue of English virtuosi's exposure, was, in many cases, the real target of this contemptuous attitude. The reason behind this unfavourable reception can be found, Michael Hunter suggests, in the manifest incongruity between the declared intentions and the actual performances of the Royal Society. Pointing out the fact that the Society in its incipient stages was concerned with work done outside its perimeters, Hunter concludes that "to some extent the decline of collaborative experiment was due to the innate impracticality of the Society's original stress on cooperative scientific research."[76] This crisis of the shared work on which Bacon had founded his entire epistemology was the major cause of the individualization of experimental activity, which led to the emergence of the scientist as an isolated individual working in the confines of his personal laboratory, while the spoils of their success were

[74] Ibid., 191.
[75] Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope,* 112.
[76] Michael Hunter, *Science and Society*, 43.

taken by the self-exposing libertines who took science for amusement. The role of the Royal Society in the creation of the virtuoso figure was rarely denied. William Wotton, in 1697, suggested that it was commonly believed that "no great Things have ever, or are ever likely to be perform'd by the *Men of Gresham*."[77]

Things were complicated by the fact that the Society could not provide an adequate professional framework for the type of activity it was trying to promote. Concerned more with the institutionalization of its community than with the pursuit of palpable scientific activity, the Royal Society in its earliest stages afforded a picture of very little progress. The weekly meetings at Gresham College were also shaped by social stratification apparent among the Fellows.

> Statistical study reveals that those of high rank [among the Fellows] were likelier to contribute to discussion than their humble and diffident colleagues, while, whatever the actual attendance, verbal participation was apt to fall to a few people. The turnover of these was surprisingly high, so that the consideration of topics lacked continuity and was often amateurish, since, apart from a few old stalwarts, the most active Fellows were frequently the newest.[78]

This passage provides an accurate picture of the atmosphere at the meetings of the scientific corporation, whose recorded members were not necessarily active within the immediate perimeter (physical and intellectual) of the Royal Society. One such example is that of Henry Power, who lived most of his life in his native Halifax, whence he came to London only a few times, and for matters which did not concern directly any scientific activity, but were rather personal in nature. The minutes of the Society's meetings, recorded in Thomas Birch's *History of the Royal Society,* abound with references to Fellows who were delegated to correspond with Power on several issues of interest to the circle. In the meantime, Power had established his own circle of scientific enthusiasts in Halifax, in the interest of which most of his activity was being performed.[79]

Van Leewenhoek is characteristic of another important branch in the structure of the Royal Society: that of foreign correspondents. The Dutch enthusiast visited London only once in his life, prior to his career change, when he turned from draper to microscopic observer. He could not, therefore, engage in face-to-face debates with the other Fellows, some of whom repeatedly expressed circumspection with regards to his findings. His

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[77] William Wotton, *Reflections Upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (London: 1697): 419; quoted in Chico 2008: p. 31.
[78] Hunter, *Science and Society,* 43.
[79] Webster, "Henry Power's Experimental Philosophy," 157.

conversations with the Royal Society were further complicated by the fact that he could not speak any modern European language, nor Latin, the scientific idiom throughout Europe. Moreover, the observations he reported to London and which were periodically printed in the pages of the *Philosophical Transactions*, were only part of his much richer activity, which he either debated among his fellow Dutchmen or demonstrated in front of representatives of the high ranks of European nobility, who frequently visited his laboratory in Delft.[80] Yet regardless of his a-typical evolution, van Leeuwenhoek is relevant to the virtuoso structure of the Royal Society in that he never studied in order to become a microscopist, and he never shared a proper philosophical view with regards to the objects of his inquiry. Marian Fournier has noted that van Leeuwenhoek's lack of training showed in his terminological preferences and in the choices he made in terms of presentation. Faced with images without precedents and without a referential basis on which to be described to others, the Dutch "had to use either conventional and everyday descriptive terms, or develop a new set of terms himself." He found the easy way out of this dilemma:

> He adopted the former course, which can be construed as the outcome of his lack of formal training in science. Lacking a feeling for the need of discriminate terms, he used the same denominator for entirely different things, solely on the ground of their overall form.[81]

For instance, he used the same term (translated into English as *animalcule*) to describe spermatozoa, various infusoria, and a number of insects, which was prone to create confusion in the readers of his letters.[82] The instability of van Leeuwenhoek's work may be also exemplified by his apparent lack of agenda ("he studied a subject in fits and starts"[83]), his ingenuous way of admitting mistakes made apparent by subsequent observations, and his tendency to retract erroneous conclusion.[84] In all these imprecisions, and in the "rather muddled presentation of his work," van Leeuwenhoek was one of the non-specialists who made up the bulk of the Society's ranks.[85] But his case was a fortunate one, his unique qualities as observer and reporter promoting him among the most respected Fellows of the London scientific organization.

[80] Ruestow, *The Microscope in the Dutch Repubic,* 162.
[81] Fournier, *The Fabric of Life*, 84.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 82.
[84] Ibid., 85.
[85] Ibid., 80.

Presence of such outsiders, who not only were strangers to London but had also espoused views often contrary to the circle's inductive denomination, only highlighted the fragmentary nature of the early Royal Society. In fact, the London organization gradually attracted its fame as an eclectic group made up of separate individualities rather than commonly shared philosophies able to support its corporate ambitions. Moreover, as Hunter points out, those who embraced the inductive values of the Royal Society may have been just opportunists who would never had any chance of a career in a scholastic environment dominated by deductivism and speculative philosophy.[86] These "minor observers" ended up forming the bulk of the Society's membership, individuals lured by the apparent facility of the method expounded by Bacon, which required from them only patience in observation and accuracy in noting down what they had observed. Conscious of their low position in the scientific hierarchy, these virtuosi often found justification in Bacon's stress on the fact that for the furthering of the scientific revolution no position was too low:

> In my natural history and experiments, many things will also be found trivial and commonplace, many that are base and ignoble, many again that are exceedingly subtle and merely speculative, and of no apparent use; and things of this kind are liable to deflect and discourage men's interest.
>
> And for those things that seem commonplace, men should bear in mind that up to now they have been accustomed to do no more than ascribe the causes of things of rare occurrence to things that occur frequently, but never to investigate the causes of the latter, simply taking them for granted.[87]

To Bacon, this had been an incentive for recommencement: since the familiar had by his time had enough of its share of attention, it was time henceforth to bring the seemingly insignificant into the foreground. Microscopy provided precisely this kind of material for the curious or industrious scientists of the late seventeenth century.

A precise definition of the term *virtuoso* is not easily possible when examined against the divergent class made up of those who were considered to be 'true' scientists. A distorted version of the utopian Renaissance intellectual, the Enlightenment virtuoso was a figure interested in everything, animated by the remarkable "panoramic scope of [his] intellectual agenda," but one who never succeeded in turning his efforts into valuable results.[88]

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[86] Hunter, *Science and Society,* 65.
[87] Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 120-21.
[88] Hunter *Science and Society*, 77.

What differentiated, however, the all-knowing courtier of the Renaissance from the amateurish fop of the Enlightenment was the fact that the former had counted on knowledge, whereas the latter yielded all too easily to the pleasures of facile contemplation. The difference between knowing and liking was everything that could tell these two figures apart, and while the courtier metamorphosed into the early modern scientist, the virtuoso was simply the by-product of the new social and political landscape, which replaced distinction through wealth by distinction through knowledge. Figures such as Henry Power, Robert Hooke, or Isaac Newton climbed the ladder of distinction in spite of their middle class origins, and consequently managed to shift the emphasis from material opulence to intellectual richness. In doing so, they provided sufficient reasons for emulation by those willing to follow in their footsteps. The lure of the affordable distinction through knowledge attracted many individuals who were not necessarily well equipped for what Francis Bacon had called the 'advancement of knowledge.' Although not counting as major contributors to the improvement of the theoretical foundations of sciences, these were, nevertheless, valuable in so far as the furthering of praxis was concerned. The Enlightenment virtuosi were these pseudo-scientists who worked ceaselessly, although not always consciously, for the bettering of scientific practices and methodologies. This is what has made scholars note that the way Enlightenment idealized progress was reflected in representations of "tireless doing."[89]

The phenomenon was made apparent by the "dichotomy between highly esteemed professionals, engaging in original brain work, and brutish toilers, plodding along in humdrum chores."[90] The satire addressing this class of pseudo scientific workers "relied on the dissonance between empirical intentions and speculative outcomes based on a priori reasoning" that made their careful observations end up in an "epistemological cacophony that rendered even the most straightforward intellectual pursuits absurdly comical," even Quixotic in their inutility.[91]

As Hunter suggests, the farther one moves from figures such as Boyle, Hooke, or Newton, the harder it becomes to qualify a person as a scientist without appealing to

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[89] Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science. Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1994), 163.
[90] Ibid., 134.
[91] Craig Ashley Hanson, *The English Virtuoso. Art, Medicine, and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 140-41. Hanson, who focuses on topics largely irrelevant to microscopy, takes to considerable extents the comparison between the figure of the virtuoso and that of Don Quixote, in the context of the parallel proliferation of trades dependent on natural sciences and English translations of Cervantes's book throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

subjective and often arguable criteria of classification. To him, the scientific scene of the post-Restoration period was shared between these "intellectual giants" and a class of enthusiasts who may have had a similar education and may have pursued similar interests, but could boast a less consistent or valuable output. Although the latter were more deservedly called *virtuosi,* the term tended to be unitarily used in relation to both amateurs and the elite of early modern scientific life, a fact which indicates that the distinction must be seen in something else than simple social stratification.[92]

Moving into the field of epistemological significance, Tita Chico sees the figure through the antagonistic relationship between the class of the scientific virtuosi and that of what Donna Harraway has called "modest witnesses," individuals attached to the work of established scientists, who "merely reflected the results from scientific experimentation."[93] Second-hand scientists performing in the shadow of the major figures, the "modest witnesses" were mere perpetuators of the scientists' agenda, with no significant role of their own in the production of knowledge, but exceedingly important in the popularization of knowledge produced by others. As pointed out by Chico, the "modest witnesses" were not the only secondary actors in the scientific field of the late seventeenth century. An equally important class of individuals who need to be accounted for is that of anonymous amateurs who never succeeded, and who remained forever unknown to the large public. These are the individuals who could be classed as *de facto* virtuosi: not direct appendices of highly ranked scientists or amanuensis to the corporate work of the Royal Society, but persons who took science in their own hands, regardless of their own theoretical education or their practical training. As opposed to them, the "modest witnesses" are employees of the scientific elite who have lost the ability of working independently. Life on their own meant that the virtuosi lost the important protection of supervised work, which consequently changed the nature of their activity. If the "modest witnesses" became, along with the scientists who had employed them, "spokesmen" of the scientific object, "the virtuoso was defined by his or her inability to overcome prejudice and desires, speaking for himself or herself *rather* than for the object, thus illuminating the cultural implications and potential of popular scientific practice."[94] This explains why so much criticism was mounted against the improper behaviour of individual virtuosi, who were refuting the social norms of the larger community in order to pursue their own, seemingly selfish, interest.

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[92] Hunter, *Science and Society,* 64.
[93] Tita Chico, "Gimcrack's Legacy: Sex, Wealth, and the Theater of Experimental Philosophy," *Comparative Drama* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 29.
[94] Ibid., 30.

Chapter 2. The life of a specimen

Object vs. specimen

I made reference in the introduction to the distinction Whitehead envisaged between objects and events, and also to the special meaning he invested in the notion of *object,* seen as an eternal and immutable entity very much alike to Plato's ideas. The special status of objects (their special conceptual malleability) can also be illustrated if the focus moves to microscopic experimentation, especially in relation to the early instantiations of the discipline. Generally speaking, most of Bacon's devotees endorsed the idea that the object (the purpose of every experiment) is something that does not exist until it is arrived at. In reality, however, the object in scientific experiments is known well before its purported discovery. This is easy to understand if we see the inductive method presupposed by scientific experience as a practice based on interpretation. "A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting," as Hans-Georg Gadamer has shown:

> [The interpreter] projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.[95]

The key point, in both hermeneutics and epistemology, is that the 'initial meaning' pointed out by Gadamer needs to be confirmed in order for the object itself to be validated. What is at work in scientific experimentation is not discovery by patient exploration (Bacon's risky assumption), but authentication. This assertion drives one to the scientific context of early modern microscopy, at the foundation of which could be

[95] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd. rev. ed., tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), 267.

found observers participating in this laborious adventure of confirmation. Here, it becomes apparent that late-seventeenth century specimens examined under microscopic conditions were nothing but embodiments of the repeated attempts at setting the record straight with regards to objects which were already known to the experimenter.

At surface, this aspect seems to undermine the relationship between newness and familiarity, but it can be circumvented by conceiving of microscopical specimen and microscopical object as not being one and the same thing. There is an essential difference between them, which lies in their ontological stability, or lack thereof. Because of its being known in advance, the object is always the same (like Whitehead's *object*), and it has to be so, since the purpose of the experiment is to arrive at every known object by successive distillations. The scientist is teleologically oriented towards this thing which stands at the end of the process like a beacon. The literary methodology employed by authors of microscopical experiments is significant in this context, since micrographic observations are always accompanied by titles. Through them, we always know the things at which we are about to arrive. Our job is made even easier by the fact that early microscopists paid attention to a great number of familiar phenomena. Bacon had advocated this propensity towards the ordinarily recognizable. He had found the lack of interest in the obvious to be one of philosophy's major flaws: "Nothing has hindered philosophy more than the failure to give time and attention to things of familiar and frequent occurrence that are accepted in passing, without any inquiry into their causes." [96]

A fly is always a fly, one would be tempted to say, because we look at it from the perspective of the knowledge we already have about flies. But is it really so? microscopy asks. A fly is not only its exterior shape. It is also the structure of that exterior, which the naked eye cannot perceive. It is again its internal structure too, in relation to which the eye is even more impotent. Plus, there is no such thing in the world as a Fly. The idea of a fly cannot be attained in its pure form. The essence of a fly, its *flyness*, rests precisely in the depth of the invisible chaos (Deleuze) from which it emerges as a visible entity, or in the immutability of the *object* (Whitehead) that it stands for. As an event that unfolds right now, at the moment of the observation, a fly can only be a specimen, a transitory item which can be crushed, dissected, drowned, injected with colourful substances, pulverized. This is why the discoveries we make through the perusal of micrographic reports take us by surprise. The large print attached at the end of Hooke's *Micrographia*, his famous representation of a flea, does not strike us as physically alien, because its shape is known

[96] Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 121.

to us from naked-eye observations. What strikes us, though, is the actual size, which makes details visible too. But this enormous size is not a natural attribute of the object: it is a characteristic of its representation, a mere connotation. In a purely denominative understanding of this principle, things are very simple and clear: no matter how accurate the drawing, no viewer can miss the fact that what they are looking at is a representation, and that it would be absurd to believe that a flea could grow to such size.

In essence, experiments cannot alter objects; they only validate them. What they do change, however, are specimens. The specimen, indeed, changes with every instance, with every observation. The specimen is the embodiment of a particular look cast upon a given object or phenomenon: an object in the making. In the light of Gadamer's definition, we can see the specimen as the attempted confirmation of an already known object. It places the indefinite article in front of the noun that represents the object. *An* ant, *a* spark in flint, *a* fossil, *a* nettle; this is what the microscopist is really dealing with in a given experiment. The actual *object* (understood here in the sense of purpose) of an experiment is the specimen. And it is a new specimen every time, a new instantiation of the class represented by the object.

Gadamer suggests that the only objectivity to be found in the course of scientific induction is the unfolding of the route to the final validation or, in his words, "the confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out."[97] Objectivity is therefore, a process, the process whereby the prescience of the object is being pushed to its final stage: 'the things themselves as they appear'. In other words, objectivity is applied methodology, and method, in its turn, is "neither a path to truth nor a set of rules that prescribe what truth is."[98] What we call method turns out to be this series of tests a scientist performs in order to arrive at the object. It does not tell us what truth is, because we do not need this kind of information; the 'truth' that must be revealed is the very *object* of the experiment, which is already known, already existent in our mind by virtue of the event's (the specimen's) direct connection to the eternal *object.* As mentioned in the introduction, Whitehead and Deleuze are very insistent on this connectedness, because in it one finds the crucial proof that the event (that which we end up seeing) is in fact the resultant of an unperceivable original category, and therefore bears with it traces of the invisible (of the chaos).

[97] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 267.
[98] Wilson, *The Invisible World,* 101.

To return to method: method cannot be the path towards the object either, because the path is non-prescriptive. It is based on aleatory choices made by the scientist in order to test the object's resistance to itself. Consequently, "method is only a help to the generation of descriptions that would not otherwise be produced, and whose acceptance depends upon factors other than how they were generated."[99] Objectivity cannot be a unitary concept, applicable to a mass of phenomena in a similar way. It is rather a set of tests and examinations that change with the conditions of the experiment to which they are being applied. Objectivity is object-specific and is worked out through specimens.

Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have recently worked on the principle according to which objectivity is a highly mobile concept, adaptable to the necessities of particular periods in the history of science. Although the term *per se* reached its modern maturity only in the nineteenth century, questions as to the objective character of scientific inquiries were already formulated in England, with striking accuracy, in the second half of the seventeenth century, when among other early practitioners of science, microscopists were faced with crucial problems raised by objects which they needed to identify. Daston and Galison name this proto-objectivity 'truth-to-nature' and characterize it as a species of representations in which the object is given attributes of generality and universality. Such representations are typological in nature. They go beyond the individual in order to arrive at a composite picture, a synthesis of all instantiations of the thing being examined: "The typical is rarely, if ever, embodied in a single individual; nevertheless, the astute observer can intuit it from cumulative experience."[100] In order to arrive at the image of his gigantic flea, Hooke went through hundreds of experiments, using hundreds of individual fleas. And all these specimens were used in order to test the validity of the notion 'flea' and to render visible those attributes of the object which were invisible to the naked eye. As a metaphor, the grand scale of Hooke's drawing can be read as a good illustration of the multitude of specimens put together in order to arrive at the final object. Every single experiment implied by the observation dealt with a different specimen, which was, virtually, to become the object flea, actually an idea of the flea, or a type. As rightly pointed out by John T. Harwood, one must not mistake Hooke's drawings for what they were not, "for the plates in *Micrographia* were works of art; though representing a single specimen, the plates were actually composites created from many

[99] Wilson, p. 101.
[100] Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 69.

observations."[101] If the pictorial representations are smooth, ordered, and aesthetically coherent as Harwood suggests, this is reflective of Hooke's need to comply with discursive expectations cast upon his activity. Janice Neri, who has shown the various social and cultural tensions to which early microscopists were being subjected, contends in relation to Hooke's drawings that "the images minimize the disjointed experience of viewing objects through the microscope and betray none of the messiness, tedium, and uncertainty experienced by early users of microscopes."[102] However, when it comes to textual representations, the process through which the specimen is turned into object is often made apparent by the experimenter, whose purpose is to collect the data from all the individual, possibly accidental, instances from which he will draw the general picture. The practice is common among seventeenth-century microscopists. Van Leeuwenhoek, for instance, is said to have patiently killed more than a hundred mosquitoes before he could acquire a good figure of the insect's mouth parts.[103] In order to observe the colour of the cornea of a drone fly, Hooke also went through a multitude of specimens. His text does not record the attempts *per se,* but they suggest that the number of successive observations must have been impressive: "The colour of [the cornea], in some Flies, was grey; in others, black, in others red; in others, of a mix'd colour; in others, spotted."[104] The simple series of 'others' is sufficient to approximate the frequency of repetitions.

At another time, in order to analyze the circulation of blood, van Leeuwenhoek examined a remarkable variety of specimens, from the crest and gills of a rooster to the ears of white rabbits, from the wings of a bat to the tail of a tadpole, and some minute fish accidentally arrived in his laboratory, and also the body of an eel, and the wings of several insects: a grasshopper, a number of butterflies, a moth.[105] By mentioning the number and variety of such specimens, the experimenter renders the process transparent,

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[101] John T. Harwood, "Rhetoric and Graphics in *Micrographia*", in *Robert Hooke. New Studies*, ed. Michael Hunter and Simon Schaffer (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989): 145. Harwood does not draw my distinction between specimen and object, but his statement is relevant for the understanding of the composite nature of experimental practices, as revealed by early modern microscopy.

[102] Janice Neri, "Between Observation and Image: Representations of Insects in Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*," in *The Art of Natural History: Illustrated Treatises and Botanical Paintings, 1400–1850*, ed. Therese O'Malley and Amy R. W. Meyers (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2008): 92.

[103] Ruestow, *The Microscope in the Dutch Republic*, 151.

[104] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 177.

[105] Antoni van Leeuwenhoek*, The Selected Works of Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, Containing his Microscopical Discoveries in Many of the Works of Nature, Translated from the Dutch and Latin Editions Published by the Author, by Samuel Hooke*, 2nd ed., 2 vols (London: printed for the translator: 1800), I, 89–112.

thus drawing attention to a presumed objectivity, based on trial and error. As confessed by van Leeuwenhoek, most of the items he examined did not afford a good picture of the circulation of blood. It was only when he turned his attention to the tail of the tadpole that he realized one important aspect of the phenomenon: that blood travels one way through veins and another through arteries. Thus, the Dutch microscopist could provide a pertinent confirmation of the theory expounded earlier in the seventeenth century by William Harvey who had also tested his theory on an impressive variety of specimens, albeit with little success.

Trial and error was an efficient method for the consolidation of reliability. Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin place this among the most important narrative techniques employed by experimental philosophers of the seventeenth century. In the case of Robert Boyle, for instance, the account of failed experiments was an incentive offered to his audience to accept the text of his observations as reliable. The trick had two major effects:

> [F]irst, it allayed anxieties in those neophyte experimentalists whose expectations of success were not immediately fulfilled; second, it assured the reader that the relator was not willfully suppressing inconvenient evidence, that he was in fact being faithful to reality.[106]

Following closely the model laid out by Boyle, whose intimate companion he was, Hooke, for one, did not shy away from including references to failures in his observations. And neither did van Leeuwenhoek for that matter. To both of them, in fact, failures were embodiments of Bacon's method of exclusion, whereby objects were meant to be arrived at by reducing the number of permutations which could cause further inquiries. "*[I]nduction,* that will be of any use for the discovery and demonstration of the arts and sciences," Bacon had asserted, "must analyse Nature by proper rejections and exclusions, and then, after a sufficient number of negatives, come to a conclusion on the affirmative instances."[107] Failed experiments make up important informational load, as they mark the territory on which subsequent experiments must *not* dwell. In other words, failure precludes further failure, and thus the way to the object is cleared.

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[106] Schaffer and Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump,* 64.
[107] Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 111.

Since the object remains the same no matter what happens to the successive specimens, the difference in experiments is given by the actual process employed in order to bring them to light. It is only by treating the object differently that the observer can produce a new event and thus hope for a new, and possibly better, representation. The value of repetition in specimen manipulation lies exactly in this unstated intention to produce new sets of data, through permutations, combinations, or new perspectives. Repetition is also warranted by the utter instability produced through the mistrust in the instrument's performance. The lack of faith in the instrument is reflected in a lack of faith in the object's constancy, to such an extent that the object needs to be perpetually examined and perpetually brought back to the most incipient stages of experimentation. "'Tis a noble resolution," Power wrote towards the end of his treatise, thus mirroring both Bacon's and Descartes' urge to doubt all achievements of human knowledge, "to begin there where all the world has ended."[108]

The experimental agenda of early modern sciences was explicitly concerned with this repeated gaze upon objects, via various specimens. It often provided the major encomiasts of the Royal Society with a convenient argument for the warranting of excessive labour, on the basis of which objectivity was being formulated. Joseph Glanvill, for instance, in his *Plus Ultra* (1668), blamed the ancient philosophers' lack of insight on their reluctance to perform "true" experiments, which would have required initiating empirical, sensorial relationships with the objects. Contrary to the scholastic view, "the *Knowledge* from which any thing is to be hoped, must be laid in *Sense,* and raised not only from some few of its *ordinary* Informations; but *Instances* must be *aggregated, compared,* and critically *inspected*."[109] The stress here is on the quantity of material brought in support of a generalization. The natural philosopher's task is to amass enough information to support a subsequent decision with regard to the axiom that can be drawn from that inordinate heap of information. Yet doing so may require perpetual returning to the beginning, which translates into slow progression, or downright stagnation. This fact was not alien to Bacon, who, moreover, did not see a risk in it, but a promise to correct procedural

[108] *Experimental Philosophy*, 191.
[109] Joseph Glanvill, *Plus Ultra or, The Progress and Advancement of Knowledge Since the Days of Aristotle*, (London: printed for James Collins, 1668), 52.

errors, stating: "The maxim 'study few things and pronounce on few things' has been the ruin of everything."[110] In fact, Bacon's metaphors repeatedly suggest immobility and dwelling upon the same grounds as virtues of his inductive method: "It is not feathers we must provide for the human understanding so much as lead and heavy weights, to restrain all leaping and flying."[111]

Thomas Sprat, who often read literally the precepts of Bacon's philosophy, advocated a kind of procrastination specific to scientific examination.

> It is not here [in natural philosophy] the most speedy, or the swiftest Determination of Thoughts, that will do the Business: here many Delays are requir'd: here he that can make a *solid Objection*, or ask a *seasonable Question*, will do more Good, than he who should boldly fix on a hundred *ill-grounded Resolutions*.[112]

The notion that specimens do not become objects unless thoroughly experimented upon is here stated again by one of the sturdy representatives of the English Baconiana.

Yet it is because of this perennial return to the origins (to the beginning of the experiment) that scientific observations attracted the scorn of its critics. Bacon himself had warned his followers that excessive and irresponsible application of his method could lead to unwanted results. Without actually defining excessive experimentation, he admits that "too much method produces repetition and prolixity as much as [no experiment] at all."[113]

In his *Characters*, not published until 1754 yet illustrative of the ways in which things were being perceived at the end of the seventeenth century, Samuel Butler wrote about the typical virtuoso: "As Men use to blind Horses that draw in a Mill, his Ignorance of himself and his Undertakings make him believe he has advanced, when he is no nearer to his End than when he had set out first."[114] It is the constant return to the origins of the experiment that Butler referred to again when he addressed the virtuoso's peculiar appetite for things that are new and exciting: "He is wonderfully delighted with Rarities, and they continue still so to him, though he has shown them a thousand Times; for every

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[110] Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 304.
[111] Ibid., 111.
[112] Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge,* 4th ed. (London: 1734), 104.
[113] Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 301.
[114] Samuel Butler, *Characters and Passages from Note-Books*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 81.

new Admirer, that gapes upon them, sets him a gaping too."[115] It is the temptation of the reassessment and of the perpetual beginnings that characterizes the virtuosic agenda, and the early microscopists inhabited successfully this category.

The static character of the virtuosic experimentation also afforded perfect satirical material for Mary Astell's parody in *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1696). In her account of the "impertinent virtuoso," the gaze of the natural philosopher is criticized for being unprofitable. Yet even if her economic concerns seem to be somewhat different from the predominantly aesthetic ones raised by Butler, the problem has not changed.

> He traficks to all places, and has his Correspondents in e'ry part of the World; yet his Merchandizes serve not to promote our Luxury, nor encrease our Trade, and neither enrich the Nation, nor himself.[116]

Stuck in this swamp of inefficiency, the observer is condemned never to advance by his trade. What characterizes him in Astell's views is an unpardonable economical stagnation, one not far from the methodological stagnation hinted at by Butler.[117] While the virtuoso's actions are frantic, the results are always the same. The satirical tone apart, one can easily notice here the core of the experimental adventure, the purpose of which may seem useless, since the result is known in advance. The *telos* of the virtuoso's endeavour is the toil of Sisyphus who never gets the boulder to the top of the hill – toil for the sake of toiling, where worldly benefit is not regarded as a valid option.

What critics saw as inhibition of advancement was in fact the rather simple, if painstaking and repetitive, process of the rematerialization of the microscopical specimen in light of its idealized 'truth-to-nature'. Seen from this perspective, putting an end to examination is almost impossible and certainly not desired by the proponents of Bacon's 'true induction'. In fact, stopping this seemingly unending chain of experimentations is a sin as great as that of not experimenting at all. It is, in Sprat's words, "rendring the Causes barren."[118]

If the experimenter is constantly blocked in the repetitive nature of his examinations, what makes him continue the toil of induction without growing tired of it? One possible answer may be found in the fascination with the spectacular representations afforded by

[115] Ibid., 81.
[116] Mary Astell, *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (London: 1696), 97.
[117] For an excellent discussion on the perception of the 'cult of attention' among the scientific virtuosi, see: Lorraine Daston, 'Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment', in *The Moral Authority of Nature*, eds Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 100–26.
[118] Sprat, *History*, 109.

the instrument. It is evident from the rhetoric of microscopical observations that magnification caused rapture in the minds of early microscopists and their audiences alike. The circulation of blood, for instance, literally 'enthralled' van Leeuwenhoek, who "spent many hours absorbed in such images," and this, "for no other reason than the sheer pleasure of the spectacle."[119] This is also supported by the fact that in his long career van Leeuwenhoek cast the 'eye' of his microscope on just about everything he could lay his hands upon, many times openly expressing admiration for the objects of his inquiry.

In Power's texts too, spectacular views produced spectacular descriptions not unlike those of his Dutch fellow member of the Royal Society:

> If you besprinkle the Object-plate, upon which you view them, with a pretty quantity of Oatmeal, you shall see what working and tugging these poor little Animals make amongst it, running and scudding amongst it, under it, over it, and into it, like Rabbits into their Burrows; and sometimes casting it and heaving it up, (as Moles or Pioners do earth) and trolling to and fro with this mealy dust … sticking to them, as if it were a little world of Animals, busying themselves in running this way and that way, and over one anothers backs; which is a spectacle very pleasant to behold.[120]

The pleasure obtained from such observations was a strong incentive and a good reason for the continuation of operations. Another reason was that, in performing these experiments, natural philosophers were often concerned not so much with the object as with the application of new experimental techniques which indeed provided them with considerable variety and implicit renewal of excitement. Microscopy was particularly interested in this type of experience since the drawbacks of the instrument required all the ingenuity the experimenters were capable of in order to render the specimen visible. As Stefan Ditzen has suggested, "[t]he skills of the opticians played a decisive role in early microscopy and defined what became visible by the new instruments."[121] In many of his observations, Hooke describes ways in which he adjusted his microscope, ground his lenses, or acquired good-quality light; and all of these ended up enlarging the list of his inventions and the picture of his ingenuity. Van Leeuwenhoek, on the other hand, was more interested in microtechniques for the manipulation of the specimens. As pointed

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[119] Ruestow, *The Microscope in the Dutch Republic,* 178.
[120] Power, *Experimental Philosophy,* 18.
[121] Stefan Ditzen, "Breaking, Grinding, Burning: Instrumental Aspects in Early Microscopical Pictures," in *Instruments in Art and Science. On the Architectonics of Cultural Boundaries in the 17th Century*, ed. Helmar Schramm, Ludger Schwarte, and Jan Lazardzig (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008): 340.

out by many historians of science, seventeenth-century microscopy knew better methods for rendering the specimens visible than mere magnification: "from simple strangulation (to make certain vessels stand out in dissection) to the recourse to ants to eat away the soft flesh around the vessels of the liver," from boiling to maceration, and from inflation to injection of fluids.[122] The last mentioned was probably the most popular technique. Van Leeuwenhoek resorted to it when, in order to make the internal structure of the specimen visible to his collaborator, he injected saffron into a piece of muscle tissue.[123]

Beyond the mere display of technical abilities, it is not hard to see in such instances the efforts of the scientist, who is proud of the manual aspects of his work. The early modern period knew, as Pamela H. Smith has pointed out, a major epistemological shift, one in which such practical skills, along with direct interaction with nature, were praised as the most appropriate forms of knowledge acquisition. The artisan, the major figure of this epistemology, represented the intersection between the specialist and the practitioner, between the thinker and the doer. The major merit of the artisan was that he had brought into the discourse of science the rhetoric and praxis of his own body. Gradually, this aspect was conveniently melted into the figure of the scientist, who, through specialization, managed to conceal the meaner origins of his trade. In Smith's words: "Artisanal bodily experience was absorbed into the work of the natural philosopher at the same time that the artisan himself was excised from it."[124] The absorption of manual skills into the portrait of the scientist may have been caused by the natural philosophers' upward mobility, and their need to construct images of themselves as socially significant figures. As Janice Neri notes, "Gentlemen did not engage in manual labour or crafts, precisely the activities that Hooke was hired to handle."[125] An approach of this type would have been sufficient to engage the scientist in a process of self-fashioning by recalibration of his social position. Thus, the major figures of early microscopy became natural philosophers while ceasing to be artisans but preserving the manual attributes of their former condition. The new epistemology that accommodated

[122] Ruestow, *The Microscope in the Dutch Republic,* 84–85.
[123] Fournier, *The Fabric of Life*, 32.
[124] Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 186.
[125] Neri, "Between Observation and Image," 101. As Neri points out, "Hooke may not have wanted to be identified with the world of instrument makers as he endeavoured to prove his trustworthiness and intellectual capability as a newly elected member of the [Royal] society" (100). This is not a far-fetched speculation, if one considers Hooke's status as a member of the lower social stratum aspiring to be placed closer to aristocratic figures such as Robert Boyle, whose assistant he was.

the figure of the scientist–artisan "emphasized practice, the active accumulation of experience, and observation of nature." More significantly though,

> this emphasis ran counter to ancient views that certain knowledge lay in *theoria* and *scientia*, which could be proved by demonstration in the form of syllogism. Practical knowledge pertained only to the particular (not the general, which was the basis of theory) and was obtained by (often fallible) sensory perception. Thus, it could never be certain and could not be proved by syllogistic demonstration.[126]

This major change in the ways in which science was being done may explain the interest in microscopy, for which observation of the particular and the uncertainty that followed were not barriers to knowledge but incentives to further inquiries. Or, as Hooke put it with the urgent tone of a revolutionary conscious of the importance of the "sincere Hand" and the "faithful Eye" of his epistemology, "the Science of Nature has been already too long made only a work of the *Brain* and the *Fancy*: It is now high time that it should return to the plainness and soundness of *Observations* on *material* and *obvious* things."[127]

Absorbed and theatrical: The aesthetic life of a specimen

Michael Fried has outlined two concepts of crucial relevance to the discourse of early microscopy. His *Absorption and Theatricality* (1980) focuses on French paintings of the second half of the eighteenth century and the critical responses generated by these paintings, but he also stresses the fact that an "absorptive tradition" existed already in the seventeenth century and even earlier.[128]

In Fried's views, *absorption*, the fundamental element of his dichotomy, reflects a special relationship between beholder and the object of his/her observation, whereby the

[126] Smith, *The Body of the Artisan*, 220.
[127] Hooke, *Micrographia*, sig. a2^{v}.
[128] Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 45.

viewer assumes that the object is frozen in an internalized state of obliviousness with regards to its surroundings, or more exactly, that the object is unaware of the viewer's presence. To Denis Diderot, the major critical source of Fried's conception, "a scene represented on canvas or on stage does not suppose witnesses."[129] This exclusion of the witness was meant to reassure the viewer that the actions of characters depicted in artistic representations were non-mediated, that they were persuasive instantiations of life-like events, or even that life itself was being performed on stage or onto the canvas.

Fried hints at the fact that contemporary reception of the paintings he analyzed tended to correlate absorption with some kind of unconscious state.[130] The association with death is almost immediate, death being obviously the ultimate form of suspension of the state of consciousness, which absorptive attitudes also undermine. It is necessary, however, to highlight that, for microscopy at least, death is not always a desirable state. Dead specimens fail to represent the active life of microscopic objects. This makes *theatricality* an indispensable concept. It goes hand in hand with that of *absorption*, by amplifying the latter and giving it an additional meaning. "For Diderot," Fried advices, "as to a greater or lesser degree for other anti-Rococo critics and theorists, a painting had to do more than demonstrate a central dramatic idea: it had to set that idea in motion, in dramatic action, right before his eyes."[131] In other words, the mere statement of an object's exceptionality is not sufficient for the effect to reach its desired outcome. Theatricality as the performative state of the actors in the scene requires from those actors not only to pose, but to be alive and well, or in other words, to play their parts in a convincing manner. In microscopical examinations, this requirement is in theory fulfilled by simply including animate specimens in laboratory work. The efforts invested in the manufacturing of technological appendices which could allow microscopic examination of live specimens is easily noticeable throughout the early history of the discipline.

Motion, the principle on which the corpuscularian view of matter was based, provided a theoretical framework within which microscopic specimens could be observed. The theory of corpuscles, with all its ramifications throughout the sciences of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was based on the idea that matter was made up of small particles (corpuscles) which entered the composition of things by moving and interacting with each other. The origin of this motion was often debated, it not being very clear whether the ability of corpuscles to move was inherent or if it was caused by a principle

[129] Diderot, *Salons*, III, p. 97; quoted in Fried, 97.
[130] Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality,* 31.
[131] Ibid., 85.

exterior to the moving particles themselves. No matter what the answers to this question were, a fact remained constant: microscopists, as well as other scientists concerned with mechanical explanations of nature, required constant presence of action, and this is where Fried's theatricality becomes significant, because it provides a firm background to visual examination.

The requirements of theatricality animate the microscopical specimen, and reveal, under the limelight, a spectacle. Henry Power describes his fly in terms that make his text resonate with theatrical passion. He does not penetrate very deep into the body of the insect (he examines the composition of the eye, though), but has a great time admiring the spectacle of the fly's motions, which to the naked eye may have been a simple routine of a creature of no importance.

> She hath a small head which she can move or turn any way: She hath six legs, but goes upon four; the two foremost she makes use of instead of hands, with which you may often see her wipe her mouth and nose, and take up any thing to eat. The other four legs are cloven and arm'd with little clea's or talons (like a Catamount) by which she lays hold on the rugosities and asperities of all bodies she walks over, even to the supportance of her self, though with her back downwards and perpendicularly invers'd to the Horizon. To which purpose also the wisdom of Nature hath endued her with another singular Artifice, and that is a fuzzy kinde of substance like little sponges, with which she hath lined the soles of her feet, which substance is always repleated with a whitish viscous liquour which she can at pleasure squeeze out, and so sodder and be-glew her self to the plain she walks on.

There is a lot of motion registered here. A spectacle unfolds, unknown to a viewer who has not employed the prosthetic instrument, but readily available to one who has. What Cynthia Wall has said about Hooke, that "his descriptions add narratives that set them in motion," is also applicable to Power.[132] The plate of the microscope is turned into a stage, and the fly ceases to be that loathsome creature nobody felt the need to examine. Attention, Lorraine Daston explains, especially attention of the kind required by microscopical examination, "created pleasure, even when directed to objects initially deemed trivial or disgusting."[133]

What is also observable in Power's account (and of enormous significance to the concepts of theatricality and absorption) is that the insect is endowed with agency. It can "line the soles of her feet," it can "at pleasure squeeze out" the gluey liquid. It is able to employ self-governance. It performs according to a script that is its own creation. What

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[132] Wall, *The Prose of Things,* 75.
[133] Daston, "Attention," 118.

seemed to be the simple mechanics of depersonalized motion becomes a willful feat, conducted by an insect capable of near-reasoning. And this aspect is essential for a state to be called absorptive: a creature without reason cannot be said to be absorbed, because there would be no suspended consciousness to mark that state. But when the specimen appears endowed with rudiments of reason, the picture changes. The fly becomes a creature worth contemplating: its movements seem suddenly less regulated by an external principle and more internalized, more the creation of a self that resembled, uncannily, the self of humans. But this is a privilege only the user of a microscope could enjoy. The "pretty Engines,"[134] as Power calls the microscopically enlarged insects, would have been completely inaccessible, due to the limitations of human senses. "Certainly," he argues in the Preface, thus bringing forth the familiar trope of the fallen human intellect, "the Constitution of Adam's Organs was not divers from ours, nor different from those of his Fallen Self, so that he could never discern those distant, or minute objects by Natural Vision, as we do by the Artificial advantages of the Telescope and Microscope."[135] Blatant advertisement for the 'mechanical eye,' one may call it, but an appropriate reflection nonetheless. The experiments performed by Power, although not as sharp and specialized as those of Hooke or van Leeuwenhoek, could easily indicate that, as Barbara Maria Stafford says in relation to the French microscopists of the eighteenth century, they were "accessible only to augumented vision."[136]

The need to animate nature was explicitly stated by Diderot, who in his *Salon de 1767* argued that "there is a law for genre painting and for groups of objects piled up pell-mell. One must suppose that they are animated and must distribute them as if they had arranged themselves, that is, with the least constraint and to the best advantage of each of them."[137] What this meant was, again, that artist and artificiality had to be removed from the scheme of the painting in order to create the impression of lack of mediation. But this was to be done in the present case by amplifying the dramatic nature of objects and their actions.

Concrete technologies that permitted the fulfillment of the need to capture action were systematically experimented with. Special holders of live fish, placed so that tails could be closely examined without the observation being hindered by the specimen's

[134] Power, "The Preface," in *Experimental Philosophy,* n.p.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Barbara Maria Stafford, "Voyeur or Observer? Enlightenment Thoughts on the Dilemmas of Display," *Configurations* 1, no. 1 (1992): 103.
[137] Diderot, *Pensées detachés*, 787; quoted in Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality,* 81.

struggle, were not only devised for laboratory use, but also for consumption by non-specialist audiences. The tails of various types of fish were a very common presence in the landscape of early microscopic specimens, because they provided very affordable images of the circulatory system, due to the objects' thinness and transparency. For this reason, specialized holders attached to the basic instrument and even live fish were a common accessory to popular models marketed throughout the Enlightenment as cheap entertainment for the curious. In general, eighteenth-century microscopes were sold with such devices attached, with a virtually unlimited spectrum of possibilities offered to amateur observers. The Wilson model, for instance, was advertised for its incredible adaptability and 'universality' and also for the fact that it contained holders for various kinds of specimens, such as fish, insects, and dust particles. Careful to please the customers, the manufacturer accompanied the instrument with specially designed holders: concave glass plates which could be held together in twos by a metal ring, so that the curious could employ them for "*Insects* that will creep away, or such Objects as one intends to keep."[138] John Cuff, famous, in mid-century, for various improvements made to the Wilson type, advertised, in 1743, one of his microscopes, mentioning the fact that the instrument was provided with "eight Ivory Sliders, and one of Brass," each holding four ready-made specimens, and he mentioned that "whoever pleases to make a large Collection of Objects may have as many as he desires."[139] Around mid-eighteenth century, George Adams, father and son, also manufactured microscopes endowed with prepared specimens, which they sold in specially contrived boxes, made to hold the microscope as well (a portable model, advertised as "The New Universal Double Microscope").[140] The models manufactured by Benjamin Martin were also praised for similar attributes. The type described in his *Description of a new universal microscope* is mentioned by Martin to have specialized auxiliaries coming along with it: a "bug box"[141] for observations on insects, a "fish pan" for the examination of the circulation of blood in fish tails,[142] and several other accessories capable of various magnifications and various degrees of exposure to light.

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[138] James Wilson, *The Description and Manner of Using Mr. Wilson's Sett of Pocket-Microscopes* (London: 1706), 3.
[139] John Cuff, *The Description of a Pocket Microscope, with the Apparatus thereunto belonging* (London: 1743), 2.
[140] Gerald L'E Turner, *Scientific Instruments 1500-1900. An Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 64.
[141] Martin, *The description of a new universal microscope,* 10.
[142] Ibid., 11.

The circulation of blood, which had created a major stir in the intellectual world with William Harvey's enunciation, in the early seventeenth century, of the fact that blood did not have a continuous linear trajectory but that it circulated differently through veins and through capillaries, was an example of the premises that motivated the search for motion in specimens for scientific examination. Blood particles in motion afforded a spectacle to which early scientists could not remain indifferent. This is illustrated by the excitement with which the subject was treated by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, who was among the first observers to provide clear visual evidence in support of Harvey's theory, accurate in its conclusions but based largely on speculative reasoning and lacking experimental support. In order to arrive at a proper generalization in connection with the flow of blood in organisms, van Leeuwenhoek examined a remarkable variety of specimens, from the crest and gills of a rooster to the ears of white rabbits, from the wings of a bat to the tail of a tadpole and some minute fish accidentally arrived in his laboratory, and also the body of an eel, and the wings of several insects: a grasshopper, a number of butterflies, a moth.[143]

Of course, the request for motion does not mean that dead specimens were not studied by microscopists, or that techniques for killing or immobilization were not developed. On the contrary, the literature of microscopic examinations is rich with details about the enhancement of the specimens' appearance by means which in the majority of cases led to the death of the specimens.

Hooke is again the leading example. Not pleased with the results of a single instance, he designed his examinations to fulfill the requirement of multiplicity, as shown in the example of his observation on ants. He was initially troubled by the extremely busy insects, the constant movement of which made it almost impossible for him to examine them in living conditions. However, killing the ants could not solve the problem, because death would transform their appearance into unrecognizable shapes. As in many similar situations in the treatise, Hooke seized the opportunity to display his ingenuity. Since he could not study them either quick or dead, he inebriated the specimens, thus taming them into submission:

> I took the creature, I had design'd to delineate, and put it into a drop of very well rectified spirit of Wine, this I found would presently dispatch, as it were, the Animal, and being taken out of it, and lay'd on a paper, the spirit of Wine would immediately fly away, and leave the Animal dry, in its natural posture, or at least, in a constitution, that it might easily with a pin be plac'd, in what

[143] van Leeuwenhoek, *The Selected Works*, 89-112.

> posture you desired to draw it, and the limbs would so remain, without either moving, or shriveling.[144]

When the insect sobered up and returned to its initial state, thus becoming problematic again, the experimenter switched back to the induced coma, which would allow him to perform his observations undisturbed. Hooke repeated the stratagem in the case of a "blue Fly," when the specimen was observed to revive after a certain time of unconsciousness. The reader is invited to admire, as the observed had, the miracle of a resurrection after a death which had been nothing but the effect of inebriation.

> One of these [blue flies] put in spirit of *Wine*, was very quickly seemingly kill'd, and both its eys and mouth began to look very red, but upon the taking of it out, and suffering it to lie three or four hours, and heating it with the Sun beams cast through a Burning-glass, it again reviv'd, seeming, as it were, to have been all the intermediate time, but dead drunk, and after certain hours to grow fresh again and sober.[145]

Van Leeuwenhoek encountered similar problems with the larva of the weevil, which was "in continuous motion" and thus resisted accurate representation. In order to render it representable, the experimenter had to interfere directly with the specimen, which he "fastened by its hind part before the microscope."[146] These operations were generated by the realization that the specimens failed to become the objects the observers had hoped to find. Power also speaks of fastening a wood-louse "to the object-plate, by a little spittle," while Hooke, in his aforementioned ant experiment, tried, at some point, to resolve the inconvenience of the "troublesome" specimens by immobilizing the insect, whose feet "were fetter'd in Wax or Glue."[147] In other situations, Power is even more interventionist in the treatment of restless specimens. The observation on "The Cow-Lady, or spotted Scarabee" starts with the formulation of the problem encountered by the experimenter: "[The scarabee] is a very lively and nimble Animal." This brief description conceals a frustration similar to that of Hooke. However, not allowing his observation to be interrupted by this impediment, Power turns immediately to the solution: "Cut off the head, and erect it perpendicular upon the neck […] and then you shall see those two little small black eyes it hath."[148]

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[144] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 203.
[145] Ibid., 185.
[146] van Leeuwenhoek, *Works I*, 21.
[147] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 203.
[148] *Experimental Philosophy*, p. 30.

These noticeable practices of restraint, immobilization, and decapitation are intended to solve the observer's frustration at dealing with difficult specimens, behind which one may sense the presence of objects that resist viewing. More exactly, they resist becoming *objects* by impeding generalization. An important conclusion to be drawn here is that specimens possess one quality which is not necessary in objects: relevance. An ant that hides away from the eyes of the microscopist is certainly an irrelevant specimen, since the specific requirement of the experiment was patient observation of static items. The object (the ideal ant, in this case) does not need to fulfill this requirement, since objects are the finality of experiments, their *raison d'être*. They cannot even be seen, in the sensorial sense of the word. In the meantime, however, specimens afford incredible spectacles, as they are the vivid embodiments of ideal objects. Their performance makes both the spectacle of theatre and the spectacle of painting, since when dead they can be displayed, either to the observer alone (if it appears only under the lens) or to a larger audience, if the solar microscope is employed. Such was the case, in the eighteenth century, with experiments performed by Henry Baker on live frogs, which were concomitantly displayed for the pleasure of his eager audiences. The solar microscope he employed could afford shared spectacles which, Barbara Maria Stafford conjectures, were able to desensitize the public in relation to the violence done to specimens. They did so by shifting the focus with regards to the experiment from slaughter to artistic representation. "This picturesque *tableau vivant* was literally suspended, or hung for viewing, in the gallery of the laboratory."[149]

Like paintings, microscopic observations are forms of representation, and therefore largely subjected to the same predicaments as pictorial illustrations. As a rule, absorption makes surroundings disappear, and this is a feature apparent in microscopic observations too. What the viewer sees in absorptive paintings as well as in optical examinations are actors utterly captivated by the object of their own performance. This explains why the minute creatures seen through the microscope were evaluated on the basis of their leading their lives in total ignorance of the viewer's presence.[150] Stafford again: "Baker seemed to rely on that fiction of voyeurism that the object agreed to its exhibition."[151] In addition to this illusion, the urgencies of scientific objectivity to exhibit images where the

[149] Stafford, "Voyeurs or Observers?," 109.
[150] This aspect is also apparent in the ethnographic accounts of travelers who delight in observing indigenous people acting in total indifference to the outsider. The more concentrated on their actions, the more credible the indigenous are, and therefore the more suitable for ethnographic study.
[151] Stafford, "Voyeurs or Observers?," 109.

knower is obliterated seem to be largely synonymous to the requests for absorptive states manifest in the artistic depictions regarded by Michael Fried. In his words, "the persuasive representation of absorption characteristically entailed evoking the obliviousness or unconsciousness of the figure or figures in question to everything other than the specific object of their absorption."[152] But in order for all these 'figures' to match the criteria of absorption there has to be a beholder who acknowledges his/her own exclusion from the act which is being described, a beholder able to recognize his/her exteriority to the interiority of the scene he/she is beholding. This acknowledgment is the acknowledgment of the microscope-user, who is aware of the fact that he/she cannot be seen; that there is a barrier between them and the world of the specimens they are contemplating. But, as Fried asserts, "the desire to solicit as wide an audience as possible," which seemed to have been the case in various instantiations of absorption, "had virtually the opposite function – to screen that audience out, to deny its existence, or at least to refuse to allow the fact of its existence to impinge upon the absorbed consciousness of his figures."[153] Requirements for absorption are, indeed, the requirements for proper scientific validation, as asserted by Karl Popper, who defines objectivity in science as precisely the state in which the scientist and the object of his inquiry are separated from each other: "Knowledge in the objective sense," Popper says, "is knowledge without a knower: it is knowledge without a knowing subject."[154]

To some extent, the reassurance of the beholder that his/her actions stand no chances of being acknowledged by the object is similar to that of the beholdee who, by inhabiting the space of oblivion, presupposes the absence of interested audiences. What makes their situation different, however, is the fact that the beholder has already initiated an act of transgression of which the object is not aware, and which the object will not initiate in its turn, unless it is placed in a context such as that of Gulliver in his travels to Brobdingnag, where the specimen is given a voice in order to expose the unequal relationship between beholder and object from the perspective of absorption. What Swift's satire succeeds in pointing out is that, in microscopy, the viewers themselves are involved in a kind of relationship with the reader which places them in the position of absorbed individuals. Being-looked-at-while-looking-at is what characterizes the textual condition of this class of observers/witnesses who inhabit the textbooks of early microscopy. To the reader,

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[152] Fried, 31.
[153] Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality,* 68.
[154] Karl Popper, "Knowledge: Objective Versus Subjective," in *Popper Selections*, ed. David Miller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 60.

who is exterior to the text, the person within the text involved in microscopic observations is equally an absorbed character, and therefore must play by the same rules of persuasion, if objectivity is to be fulfilled.

Readers' awareness as to the absorptive state of the observer was frequently caricatured via the stock character of the absent-minded peepshow spectator, who resembles very much the figure of the microscopist. In many eighteenth-century illustrations, the rapture exercised by the illusions of the peepshow was represented to be so efficient in numbing the viewer's senses, that pickpockets could make an easy prey of these ignorant curious.[155]

A similar awareness is also apparent in the critical and satirical reactions to scientific attentiveness in general. In his *Characters*, not published until 1754, yet illustrative of the ways in which things were being perceived at the end of the seventeenth century, Samuel Butler wrote about the typical virtuoso: "As Men use to blind Horses that draw in a Mill, his Ignorance of himself and his Undertakings make him believe he has advanced, when he is no nearer to his End than when he had set out first."[156] What Butler is suggesting here is the essential condition of absorption: captivated by his own work but oblivious of his surroundings, the scientific observer fails to notice that his pursuits may become anachronistic, or that he is not fulfilling the requirement of the advancement of knowledge.

The enclosed, self-effacing nature of the activities performed by the virtuoso, who prefers the company of his specimens instead of that of his fellow human beings, Mary Astell suggests is instrumental in the programmatic exclusion of audiences. "His Travels are not design'd as Visits to the Inhabitants of any Place, but to the Pits, Shores, and Hills; from whence he fetches not the Treasure, but the Trumpery."[157] As pointed out by Lorraine Daston, Astell's critical voice fits well into the general tendency in the period towards deriding intellectual pursuits with no profitable outcomes and no economic worth. "The ridicule heaped on the preoccupations of the new-style naturalists was directed not so much at natural philosophy *per se* as at the disproportion between the time, resources, and passion consumed and their objects."[158] The "misdirected attention"

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[155] Richard Balzer, *Peepshows: A visual history* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 68-71.
[156]Samuel Butler, *Characters and Passages from Note-Books*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 81.
[157] Astell, *An Essay in Defense of the Female Sex,* 97.
[158] Lorraine Daston, "Attention and the values of nature in the Enlightenment," in Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal, editors: *The moral authority of nature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004): 103.

which characterized the laboratory work of early microscopists was employed to the detriment of the virtuosi's relevance in the society of learned men, where conversation was expected to be flexible and universal, covering a broad variety of subjects, rather than being restricted to the repetitive patois of absorbed observers, who were willing to see nothing that passed beyond the borders of their own discipline.[159]

As seen from the treatment of the topic by Astell, absorption, when materialized in excessive attention, raises a number of questions with regards to the utility of the scientific act. In Thomas Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*, Sir Formal Trifle, the principal acolyte of Sir Nicholas Gimcrack (the amateur scientist referred to by the title), asserts that "to study for use is base and mercenary".[160] Gimcrack also rejects utility from the scheme of experimental philosophy: "I care not for the practic. I seldom bring anything to use, 'tis not my way. Knowledge is my ultimate end."[161] The topic of utility, promptly raised by Mary Astell and Margaret Cavendish, placed an important economic emphasis on the value of experimentation. What they seem to criticize is the type of activity performed by the virtuosi, whose work made manifest "the divide between theory and praxis."[162] Obviously, the target of such satirical enterprises was the Royal Society. The theoretical scaffolding which supported the formation of the Society, with its stress on observation as *the first* (and not *the only*) step towards empirical generalizations, was often overlooked by the Fellows, who seem to have been constantly distracted by the outstanding nature of their material.

[159] Ibid., 104.
[160] Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso,* ed. Marjorie Hope Nicholson and David Stuart Rodes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 47.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Tita Chico, "Gimcrack's Legacy: Sex, Wealth, and the Theater of Experimental Philosophy," *Comparative Drama* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 33.

Chapter 3: Superlatives of vision

Monsters revealed by the 'artificial informer'

Towards the end of his *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), Daniel Defoe examined various aspects of the symptomatology of plague and the ways in which it was regarded at the time of the great epidemic of 1665. Among the popular beliefs listed by Defoe in this part of the *Journal* there is a reference to empirical ways in which individuals contemporary to the epidemic believed the disease could have been detected before it turned into the devastating calamity it ended up being. The list is long and covers a wide range of practices and superstitions, one of which reads:

> I have heard it was the opinion of others that [the disease] may be distinguished by the [contagious] party's breathing Written upon a piece of glass, where, the breath condensing, there might living creatures be seen by a microscope, of strange, monstrous, and frightful shapes, such as dragons, snakes, serpents, and devils, horrible to behold. But this I very much question the truth of, and we had no microscopes at that time, as I remember, to make the experiment with.[163]

To start with, Defoe's brief reference to the optical instrument is characteristic of the general method he employed throughout the book, a method not unlike the routine of scientific inquiry, consisting in mixing eye-witness testimonies with personal observations. Although sympathizing with the scientific cause, Defoe was not himself a scientist. "I am not physician enough to enter into the particular reasons and manner of these differing effects," he confessed only a few pages prior to the microscope reference in the *Journal*, at a point where he was trying to make sense of the huge variety of individual responses to the disease.[164] Similarly, the argument that "I am only relating

[163] Daniel Defoe, *A journal of the Plague Year* (Harmondsworh: Penguin Books, 1966), 214.
[164] Ibid., 211-12.

what I know, or have heard" explains why Defoe's reference to the microscope is more concerned with popular beliefs and superstitions than serious scientific examination.[165]

Much has been speculated about the intellectual relationship between Defoe and Henry Baker, the president, at some point, of the Royal Society, who in 1729 married Sophia, the writer's youngest daughter, thus becoming Defoe's son-in-law.[166] The two had collaborated in the project of starting the *Universal Spectator* and *Weekly Journal*. The theories of language and education expounded by Defoe in the last years of his life seem to have been considerably influenced by Baker, who had been known in the epoch as a teacher of deaf children.[167] However, at the time of Defoe's death, in 1731, Baker had not yet published his *Microscope made easy* (1743), nor the *Employment of the microscope* (1753), his two greatly popular works dealing with the science of microscopy. Defoe could not have known, therefore, much about microscopes when he was writing his *Journal of the Plague Year*. In fact, as suggested in the paragraph quoted above, he may have been completely unfamiliar with the instrument at the time of the epidemic, which is not hard to understand, knowing that Power and Hooke published their works in 1664 and 1665 respectively, *Micrographia* being completed shortly before the plague started ravaging London. Hooke himself did not seem to be better acquainted with the connection between the microscopic subvisibilia and the outburst of plague. As explained by Stephen Inwood,

> The idea that the flea, whose beautifully designed body had been one of the greatest wonders displayed in *Micrographia*, played any part in transmitting the disease never crossed Hooke's mind, or occurred to any of his colleagues.[168]

Defoe's lack of familiarity with the microscope had already shown through in 1705, when he wrote *The Consolidator*, a utopian novel/satire about a trip to the Moon where the narrator encounters various scientists, some of whom are, like Swift's virtuosi at the grand academy of Lagado, proficient in the use of optical instruments.[169] What Defoe called, in the *Consolidator*, a microscope was in fact a telescope, used by the inhabitants of the Moon to watch bodies and phenomena taking place at great planetary distances (on

[165] Ibid., 212.
[166] Bradbury, *The Evolution of the Microscope,* 114.
[167] Maximilian Novak, *Daniel Defoe: Master of fiction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 650.
[168] Inwood, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, 78.
[169] Daniel Defoe, *The Consolidator,* ed. Michael Seidel, Maximilian E. Novak, Joyce D. Kennedy (New York: AMS Press, 2001).

Earth, more precisely), and therefore not with the intention of magnifying invisibilia, which would have been the true domain of microscopy.

However incorrect from a scientific point of view, Defoe's references are far from irrelevant. What they manage to point out (albeit from the perspective of satire, and inspired by no apparent scientific agenda) is the outstanding character of the objects used as microscopic specimens. The monsters and devils referred to by the subjects of his survey in the *Journal* were already insistently pointed at in the early ages of microscopic observations, by critics of the newly developed science.

Margaret Cavendish, the first woman ever to have entered the precincts of Gresham College, had strongly opposed microscopy, grounding her critical take on Hooke on the assertion that what microscopic observations offered to the external observer was mere hybrid monstrosities, mixtures of nature and art, and not the trustworthy representations afforded by naked-eye examinations. In her *Observations upon experimental philosophy*, published in 1666 as an immediate response to *Micrographia*, Cavendish refers to optical sciences thus:

> Truly, my reason can hardly be persuaded to believe, that this artificial informer (I mean the microscope) should be so true as it is generally thought; for, in my opinion, it more deludes than informs. It is well known, that if a figure be longer, broader, and bigger than nature requires, it is not its natural figure; and therefore, those creatures, or parts of creatures, which by art appear bigger than naturally they are, cannot be judged according to their natural figure, since they do not appear in their natural shape; but in an artificial one, that is, in a shape or figure magnified by art, and extended beyond their natural figure.[170]

Cavendish does not deny here that microscopes can magnify objects and bring them closer to the eye. What she argues against is the possibility of accepting the validity of the claims to naturalism of such artificially-enhanced objects. Throughout the *Observations,* she repeatedly suggests that things invisible to the naked eye should not be forced into visibleness, since if they are not knowable by the unassisted human senses it means that they are destined to remain naturally in this state. Their invisibility is their nature and any attempt at transgressing this ontological certitude is prone to produce counter-natural signs; in other words: monstrosity.[171]

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[170] Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 60.

[171] We can see here the connection to Defoe's anecdote of monsters and devils, and also to Swift's satire.

Cavendish was inclined to assert that representation by means of art is impossible, since a limited domain such as art cannot possibly represent an entity that is incommensurably larger than it, such as nature. For, she assures us, "the all-powerful God, and his servant nature, know, that art, which is but a particular creature, cannot inform us of the truth of the infinite parts of nature, being but finite itself."[172] The subject cannot know the master, since it does not have access to the higher order of the latter. This is, in Cavendish's vision, what the microscope actually reveals: a hybrid made capable of deceiving the senses and not of helping them. And this is where the technical problems of optical aberrations find their aesthetic counterparts.

> [A]rtificial glasses [may] present objects, partly natural, and partly artificial; nay, put the case they can present the natural figure of an object, yet that natural figure may be presented in as monstrous a shape, as it may appear misshapen rather than natural: For example; a louse by the help of a magnifying glass appears like a lobster, where the microscope enlarging and magnifying each part of it, makes them bigger and rounder than naturally they are. The truth is, the more the figure by art is magnified, the more it appears misshapen from the natural, insomuch as each joint will appear as a diseased, swelled and tumid body, ready and ripe for incision.[173]

To the simultaneity of the external and the internal elements of the object, Cavendish adds here the need to distinguish between natural form and artificial perception. The microscope cannot be true to nature since the image revealed by it is proportionally different from the object perceived by the naked eye. As in the coexistence of the outside and the inside of the object, the artificial perception by means of microscopes is also an inconvenient hybrid form, which demands that the observer be aware of an important fact: that we cannot see magnified images and think of them as natural at the same time. Working with two sets of realities which need to be kept in continuous balance, the microscopist encounters serious difficulties. Isobel Armstrong thinks that this must have created ambiguity, a "strange double vision": a dual standard of perception caused by the fact that "the peering microscopist adjusted to one set of proportions under the microscope and to another outside it."[174]

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[172] Cavendish, *Observations*, 48.
[173] Ibid., 50
[174] Isobel Armstrong, "The Microscope: Mediations of the Sub-Visible World," in *Transactions and Encounters: Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century,* ed. Roger Luckhurst and Josephine McDonagh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 31.

The play with proportions was therefore a very risky undertaking, since experimenters parted with a familiar discourse, based on natural perception, and ventured into dealing with an artificial reality whose only modes of expression were speculation and the argument of similarity. By asserting that objects within objects can exist in an infinite progression of details, the microscopists were already at odds with Margaret Cavendish but this polemic situation became even sharper at the beginning of the eighteenth century with George Berkeley, who also measured nature with the natural eye. In his view, microscopes were far from providing improvements to human senses, since the senses were themselves hard to trust. Berkeley thought that humans were incapable of visually perceiving abstract concepts such as distance, magnitude or position in space. This was an ability that could only be acquired by means of reason. Nevertheless, as Berkeley himself admitted, reason can be deceived by sensorial data, which is utterly unreliable because it is based on previous experience or common sense. In the Berkeleian epistemological system sensorial knowledge is the continuous piling up of information from memory and the processing of this information in accordance to the individual's ability to recognize patterns of knowledge formation. In other words, the clearer our previous experiences of an object the more likely we are to interpret a present perception in the light of our memory of the past encounter with an object of similar nature.

Of "sensible extension," which is one of the most important features of microscopy, Berkeley says that it is "not infinitely divisible. There is a *Minimum Tangible* and a *Minimum Visible,* beyond which sense cannot perceive."[175]

The problem with Berkeleian epistemology of vision is that it refers the reader to an experience which does not take the microscope as an alternative form of knowledge acquisition. In Berkeley's argument, the knowledge made possible by microscopy is deceiving because it represents a set of data that cannot be related to previous experiences. The internal structure of an insect is a reality impossible to identify among human experiences because the very medium that makes this structure visible is not natural but artificial.

Berkeley distinguishes between visual perception and tactile perception, the latter being considered to be more accurate and more reliable, since it is closer to the actual object. We judge distance, magnitude or position of the object in connection with the experience we have acquired through the sense of touch. A visible object is judged to be

[175] George Berkeley, "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision," in *The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne,* ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, vol. I (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948), 191.

at a distance because it cannot be physically touched by the observer, the touching of it giving the observer the true measure of the object, as it exists in nature. Similarly, magnitude is judged in accordance with tactile experience. Berkeley considers the blurring of the image when the object is brought close to the eye a tactile experience and consequently judges it as the origin of our "visive perception." This is because we interpret the blurred image in accordance to our previous experiences of blurred images, which tell us that the object has been brought very close to the eye, in fact within palpable reach. A condition *sine qua non* of this type of perception is that the observer be aware of both the tactile and the visible object. Otherwise, due to the process of knowledge acquisition through learning, the visible data is always confused with the tangible. This, Berkeley argues, is a false knowledge, since the senses of sight and touch are in fact unconnected. To prove this he employs an often-used example, first formulated by Descartes and later embraced by the likes of William Molyneux and John Locke. He invites the reader to imagine "a man born blind and then made to see."[176] As all the previous experiences of this blind man had been acquired through the sense of touch, it follows that all his knowledge of the external world is limited to tactile representations. Therefore, when the man "is made to see" his first response to the external world will still be tactile in nature. A visible object will not appear to him to be connected in any way to what he knows from having touched the same object. He does not, in fact, recognize the visible object as a familiar object, because he does not have the experience necessary for the identification of it among the multitude of visible objects. This is equally applicable to the perception of magnitude, or perspective. The blind man will not be aware of different degrees of visible closeness or distance from his body, since he has not experienced visible magnitude and distance before. Consequently, the objects he sees are situated in a plane space, which knows no foreground, no background and, in conclusion, no perspective. This is where the concept of the "minimum visible" shows its utility for Berkeley. He defines it as the smallest perceivable division of the object: a point that cannot be further split or divided. He uses the term "visible point" to better describe the situation, assuming that a point can be said to be the smallest possible division of an image. According to Berkeley's theory, the "minimum visible" is able to prove that magnification cannot be perceived. "[I]t being certain," he asserts, "that any visible point can cover or exclude from view only one other visible point, it follows that whatever object intercepts the view of another hath an equal number of visible points with it; and

[176] Ibid., 203.

consequently they shall both be thought by [the formerly blind] to have the same magnitude."[177] Berkeley's exemplification of this theory suggests that magnitude is an absurd concept. "[It] is evident that [a blind man made to see] would judge his thumb, with which he might hide a tower or hinder its being seen, equal to that tower, or his hand, the interposition whereof might conceal the firmament from his view, equal to the firmament."[178] Magnitude is, therefore, inexistent in nature, because (unmediated) nature does not work by means of 'double vision,' as sciences (which are artificial) do. It is only by means of learning and self-deception that humans come to perceive magnification as possible in relation to natural objects. Here is, of course, the main criticism directed against microscopy, which is thus deprived of its very *raison d'être*, magnitude being one of the abstract tenets that support magnification.

If we don't believe that by bringing the object closer to the eye we magnify it, we will be equally suspicious of the functioning of the microscope. And indeed Berkeley attacks the science of microscopy on grounds that have to do with its reliability, not unlike Cavendish before him. He notes not only the artificiality of the concept of magnification, but the shortcomings of focalization as well.

> Of those things that we take in at one prospect we can see but a few at once clearly and unconfusedly: and the more we fix our sight on any one object, by so much the darker and more indistinct shall the rest appear.[179]

Although he refers to focalization of natural vision, Berkeley is aiming at the microscope, for which the singling out of the specimen is the means by which focalization is produced. As a matter of fact, Berkeley intuited here an important truth of scientific representation: focalization decontextualizes. Taken out of its environment, the specimen ceases to be what it is: an object in a contextual framework. In nature, no object can exist without a context. Separate objects are not natural entities. In nature, objects are not defined by their ontological position but by the relationships which they enter. Just as Cavendish had argued before, Berkeley suggests that separating objects from contexts is made possible only by artifice, which does it in a perverse and perverting manner, by programmatically ignoring the natural state of objects. Not surprisingly, Berkeley finds the instrument ineffectual in the quest for the amelioration of natural vision:

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[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid., 205.

> In neither of those two ways [magnification and focalization] do microscopes contribute to the improvement of sight; for when we look through a microscope we neither see more visible points, nor are the collateral points more distinct than when we look with the naked eye at objects placed in a due distance.[180]

What Berkeley is trying to say here is that the microscope's intervention in the discourse of nature is not only tautological (in that it expresses something that nature has already made explicit), but also ridiculous since it cannot compete with nature on grounds of visual perception without contradicting the principles on which it pretends to stand.

Berkeley also comments that microscopes are unreliable because they elude the tangible, which he had considered to be the foundation of visual perception.

> A microscope brings us, as it were, into a new world: It presents us with a new scene of visible objects quite different from what we behold with the naked eye. But herein consists the most remarkable difference, to wit, that whereas the objects perceived by the eye alone have a certain connexion with tangible objects, whereby we are taught to foresee what will ensue upon the approach or application of distant objects to the parts of our own body, which much conduceth to its preservation, there is not the like connexion between things tangible and those visible objects that are perceived by help of a fine microscope.[181]

Like all prosthetics, the microscope loses the essential affinity with the object and, as a consequence, the representation resulting from this miscommunication is in itself treacherous. Moreover, in Berkeley's logic, the newness microscopy brings about is microscope's worst enemy, because in newness there is no memory of the object and therefore no chance for the observer to return to previous experiences in order to define the object. It needs to be pointed out, however, that Berkeley does not eradicate novelty from the discourse of microscopy, nor the possibility to produce new knowledge by bringing about new images. Where he stands against microscopy is in his assertion that this new knowledge cannot be trusted in a discourse that takes facts as the only measures of reality. Similar to Cavendish's belief that experimental philosophy in general and microscopy in particular are the domains of fiction or invention, Berkeley suggests that microscopic observations may find their place in arts and literature but not in philosophy. In line with his argument one may conclude that microscopists are doomed to remain unreliable observers, because they are from the offset deceived in their perception.

[180] Ibid., 205-6.
[181] Ibid., 206.

The critical approach employed by Cavendish and Berkeley did not fall on empty ground. In fact, textual practices familiar to early microscopists, notably Power and Hooke, who were the actual aims of Cavendish's attacks, offered a weighty support to her assumptions, by providing an incredibly rich narrative and descriptive material which overflowed the objects, exaggerating their attributes and over-emphasizing their appearances to an extent that could not remain unnoticed. In fact, the very purpose behind the specific processes of decoration and display to which objects were subjected was to bring the specimens into the world, so to speak; to make them visible, loud and gaudy; in other words, impossible to ignore. It is safe to state that what constituted microscopic objects in the second half of the seventeenth century, and more so in the eighteenth, were superlatives of representation: loud statements of the objects' presence in a field which was actively in search for confirmation. In the hands of early microscopists, the trivial turned into glorious idealisations that bore an almost lyrical shine, and made a life of fame for the recorded objects. Marc Olivier suggests that "[i]n grand scale, tiny specimens entered the lives of the wealthy through large, sumptuous, picture books." [182] He speaks of Hooke's large plates accompanying *Micrographia,* and especially the drawing of the flea folded at the end of the book, in terms that highlight the force of grand representation: "The detail and majesty of the engraving seem to contradict the nature of the subject, and yet the flea demands respect when seen through a microscope."[183] One can find this amazement at the sight of insignificant and disgusting matter illustrated (if only for a satirical purpose: satirizing microscopy, as well as politics) in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, when the hero is shown to suffer a shock at the sight of lice crawling on beggars' bodies:

> I could see distinctly the Limbs of these Vermin with my naked Eye, much better than those of an *European* Louse through a Microscope, and their Snouts with which they rooted like Swine. They were the first I had ever beheld, and I should have been curious enough to dissect one of the,, if I had

[182] Olivier, "Binding the book of nature," 186.
[183] Ibid.

> proper Instruments (which I unluckily left behind me in the Ship) although indeed the Sight was so nauseous, that it perfectly turned by Stomach.[184]

Swift may have intended to just play a pun on the manifest magnification of objects of little worth, but the effect he achieved was not at all different from the effect the sight of Hooke's drawings must have acquired at the publication of *Micrographia*.

Judging by the insistence with which Hooke refers to the extraordinary visual bearing of his specimens, *Micrographia* proves to be standing on aesthetic rather than empirical criteria. The seeds of a particular plant "afford exceeding pleasant and beautifull objects"[185]; "the order, variety, and curiosity" in the shape of the "Purplane-seeds" "make it a very pleasant object for the *Microscope*"[186]; also "the Wings of all kinds of Insects, are, for the most part, very beautifull Objects"[187]; the eggs of silk-worms "afford a pretty object for a Microscope"[188]; the blue fly "is a very beautifull creature, and has many things about it notable"[189]. Hooke never tires of pointing out the beauty of the specimens he is contemplating, as if only that which is beautiful is worthy of being advertised as a microscopic wonder.

A similar type of descriptive prose is employed by Power in *Experimental Philosophy*. The eye of a horse-fly "is an incomparable pleasant spectacle,"[190] writes Power, just as a field spider is "a glorious spectacle to behold."[191] A "little greenish Grasshopper or Locust" is also described as a "pretty Animal" which is "a pleasant Object to look upon in our Glass"[192]. What is immediately observable in these notations of Hooke's and Power's is that the beauty of the specimen becomes a criterion of evaluation by aesthetic inversion. Objects which to the naked eye appear insignificant or even ugly, through the microscope appear worthy of attention and contemplation. The instrument is a source of epiphany for experimenters, and they treat it accordingly. Both Hooke and Power are very prompt in pointing out the contrast between the perception of the naked eye and the artificial representation of the optical instrument. In the case of Hooke's "wandring Mite," for instance, we read that "these Creatures to the naked eye seemed to be a kind

[184] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels,* ed. Robert Demaria Jr. (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 105.
[185] Hooke, *Micrographia,* 152.
[186] Ibid., 156.
[187] Ibid., 172.
[188] Ibid., 181.
[189] Ibid., 182.
[190] Power, *Experimental Philosophy*, 6.
[191] Ibid., 13.
[192] Ibid., 26.

of black Mite, but much nimbler and stronger then the ordinary Cheese-Mites; but examining them in the *Microscope*, I found them to be a very fine crusted or shell'd Insect."[193] The intervention of the microscope in this and many other cases not only reveals the hidden nature of the creature under scrutiny, it also changes its identity. The "wandring mite" is transferred from the taxonomical province in which 'naked-eye philosophy' and traditional biology had situated it and made to dwell in an entirely different, unexpected system of reference. The structure of this system is given by the special status of the microscope as man-made, therefore non-natural, organ of perception. In saying that the microscope discovers a detail hitherto unknown, Hooke is in fact drawing attention to the incapacity of the established descriptive apparatus to represent the truth of his discovery. Given this inability, the observer is assuming the task of reshaping the specimen via transformative descriptions, a method also embraced by Power. In his account of the cheese-mite, the microscope reveals limbs which had not been visible before: legs "smaller than the smallest hair our naked eye can discover."[194] These minute objects are beyond our perceptive abilities since they are smaller than what the human eye can see. As Isobel Armstrong argues, in a situation of this type the sense of unreality is made apparent since "we do not *see* with the naked eye, which is effectively blind."[195] What we use in order to perceive these barely visible details is not the sense of sight but reason. The intervention of the microscope, an artificial instrument, will not modify our natural perception but will transport it into a territory where representations are also artificial. In other words, it constructs a world which is altogether artificial, a fiction, which needs to be treated accordingly. In this way, microscopic observation alters the truth revealed by the naked eye. As an immediate result of this alteration, the meaning of the specimen is also changed. An eye which is unable to see the legs of a mite would support a definition of the insect as a legless creature. This is its 'natural' reality, because this is the way it is perceived without instrumental enhancements. Once the microscope intervenes and the picture is changed, the specimen is altered in its most intimate aspect; in the way in which it *is*. Ontologically, the mite is no longer a mite, but a mite with legs.

What both Hooke and Power are trying to bring to the foreground is the fact that microscopes can reveal a form of inner beauty, which otherwise remains hidden and unknown. Aesthetically oriented as they are, it is *beauty* that they want to unveil. But there is a further problem with this type of beauty, as it transgresses the traditional, verified,

[193] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 205.
[194] Power, *Experimental Philosophy*, 16.
[195] Armstrong, "The Microscope," 37.

and agreed-upon aesthetic category of the beautiful. In the perfectionist idiom of scholastic aesthetics, based on the Aristotelian establishment of a hierarchy of genres in terms of the status of their subject matter, vermin, bodily secretion and putrefaction are not supposed to be beautiful. In pictures proclaiming to be in search for perfection, the ugly or the suspicious have no place. Microscopic observations and the descriptive apparatus they engage supply the visual referentiality needed in order to transport irreverent notions of beauty into the place whence they had been continuously rejected: high culture.

It is primarily in Power's depictions that we find this characteristic in its most obvious form. His written reproductions abound in details inspired by Baroque aesthetics, with minute attention to detail and lavish decorative symbolism. Like Baroque artists, Power's text endows the objects with a type of beauty that is excessive and multi-layered. It is excessive in that it agglomerates "minute particulars," to use a phrase coined by Jane Austen.[196] It is multi-layered because it discovers gradual regressions of details: object within object, "situation within situation, world within world,"[197] each needing their own description, their own situation within the complex universe of embedded representations. What is narrated again and again is a form of evolution achieved through reduction. The optic instrument employed by Power reveals not only the specimen but parts of its body and even details of those parts, in a continuous chain of visual causalities, every section depending on another, every part being generated by another:

> I could perfectly see the divisions of the head, neck, and body. To the small end of the oval Body was fastned the head, very little in proportion to the body, its mouth like that of a Mole, which it open'd and shutt; when open'd it appear'd red within.[198]

Armstrong suggests that microscopes succeed in promising to yield a world full of surprises, where no image can be said to be the final one, where what becomes fully apparent is the truth that "it is impossible to get to the end of seeing, impossible to see everything."[199] This is exactly the impression the reader receives from Power's fragment quoted above, which seems to suggest that the gradual conquering of the invisible space and the advancement towards the most hidden detail are processes with no end. From the body of the specimen as a whole the microscope goes to its head, from its head to its

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[196] Jane Austen, *Emma* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1962), 369.
[197] Susan Steward, *On Longing*, 45.
[198] Power, *Experimental Philosophy*, 16.
[199] Armstrong, "The Microscope," 49.

mouth, and it proves that it can see even the red colour of a tongue and, should the instrument receive the proper improvements of twenty-first century electron microscopy, even the taste buds, with their epithelium, composed of cells with their own internal structure.

Power and Hooke believed strongly in the fact that every single detail can be revealed by the microscope and that human vision can be thus helped to pierce through the thickest surface and discover new details. As impressed as he is by the "wandring Mite," Hooke is able to realize that there is far more to be seen in it than what meets the microscope's eye,

> for could we exactly anatomise this little Creature, and observe the particular designs of each part, we should doubtless, as we do in all her more manageable and tractable fabricks, find much more reason to admire the excellency of her contrivance and workmanship, then [sic] to wonder, it was not made otherwise.[200]

In this atmosphere of infinite possibilities, Power's descriptions reveal creatures adorned for the event of their own discovery. When he examines 'the Common Fly' in the third Observation of his treatise, Power sees "a very pleasant Insect to behold: her body is as it were from head to tayl studded with silver and black Armour."[201] When he moves to the eye of a "Grey, or Horse-Fly", he discovers "a semisphaeroidal figure; black and waved, or rather indented all over with a pure Emerauld-green, so that it looks like green silk Irish-stitch, drawn upon a black ground, and all latticed or chequered with dimples like Common Flyes, which makes the Indentures look more pleasantly."[202] The squander of descriptive resources is striking: complex adjectives, past participles with adjectival value, adverbs and nouns contribute to the shaping of the specimen in terms that are drawn from the textual substance of other objects. The favourite figure is metaphor. The favourite part of speech is the adjective. An insistent search for words is also apparent in this passage. The text knows an abundance of nouns and adjectives, of which the latter, playing the role of semantic modifiers, bear more weight. It is significant to note here that Oxford English Dictionary cites the above sentence as the first instance of the use of the adjective "semisphaeroidal." The change of grammatical categories observable here is an indication of the search for forms of expression that microscopic observations made possible. Susan Stewart is absolutely right in her lyrical emphasis: "Because of the

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[200] Hooke, *Micrographia,* 205-6.
[201] Power, *Experimental Philosophy*, 4-5.
[202] Ibid., 7.

correspondences it must establish, writing about the miniature achieves a delirium of description. The arrested life of a miniature object places it within a still context of infinite detail."[203]

The enlargement of the small

One of the major dangers posed by the microscope lies in the fact that its jargon threatens the picture of man. The abundance of analogies throughout the major texts of early microscopy creates an unprecedented bridge over the chasm separating humans from animals, plants or even minerals. The non-human is brought so close to the eye that it mingles with the human sphere; in fact, it is symbolically humanized, and this transformation is prone to create major representational confusions. The armours worn by the crustaceous insects in *Micrographia* or *Experimental Philosophy* provide only one such example. A female gnat appear as if ready for battle: "About the wings there were several joynted pieces of Armor, which seem'd conveniently contriv'd, for the promoting and strengthening the motion of the wings."[204] Power's fly is even more resembling of a knight in full attire: "His neck, body, and limbs are also all beset with hairs and bristles, like so many Turnpikes, as if his armour were palysado'd about by them."[205]

Other specimens attain even grander statuses. Hooke, for instance, imagined his putrefaction-generated insects to have been present at the great moment of Creation. The "wandring Mite," he asserts, as well as "many other animate beings, that seem also to be the mere product of putrifaction, may be innobled with a Pedigree as ancient as the first creation."[206] The most despicable insects are seen as participating in the unfolding of the most important moment of human history: this is an assertion that amounts to utter blasphemy.

[203] Stewart, *On Longing,* 46-47.
[204] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 195.
[205] Power, *Experimental Philosophy,* 2.
[206] Hooke, *Micrographia,* 207.

Now, of course, this transfer of attributes from humans to animals was not unknown to literary representation. The Aesopic tradition had been lavishly illustrating the topic since its rediscovery in the late Middle Ages. But the difference consists in the fact that microscopical observations don't have a moralistic intention (at least not an obvious one). They do not set out to teach conduct or matters of social intercourse. On the contrary: their world is a-moral. If there is any morality to be extracted from these narratives it is that one should not separate too drastically human attributes from animal qualities. Microscopy insists on the fact that qualities perceived in the 'large' are also visible in the 'little.' And this, of course, is applicable to humans just as well.

Microscopy extracts the human individual from his anthropocentric system of reference and throws him into a disheartening relativism. Man is no longer above the rest of Creation, but an equal element in the divine scheme of things. He does not govern but is governed and participates in this great blueprint of the natural world like (to preserve the martial metaphor) just another humble foot soldier.

As pointed out by Lisa Jardine, seventeenth-century microscopy came into being at a time dominated by increasing demands for monumentality.[207] These demands formed the corporate foundations of the Royal Society. The society's scientific projects were propelled by the need to emphasize outputs in order to provide justification for the enormous amount of intellectual activity and economic investment required by the pursuing of scientific knowledge.[208] Large scale projects, such as the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Saint Paul, destroyed during the great fire of 1665 (a project in which Hooke was actively engaged alongside Christopher Wren), were not just visible objects displayed in public spaces. They were also expensive, detailed, and grandiose. They could show the world that the blaring criticism directed against the practitioners of the new philosophy of nature was unfairly rejecting promising scientific tasks as vain, wasteful projects. They could also show that Bacon's formulation of sciences as publicly-oriented disciplines of the intellect were being successfully materialized.

As demonstrated by Michael Hunter, the early Royal Society, a structure constantly in search for financial support, had to fulfil certain principles of 'correct conduct' in order to attract the sympathy of its funders.[209] In other words, the society had to render itself

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[207] Lisa Jardine, "Monuments and Microscopes: Scientific Thinking on a Grand Scale in the Early Royal Society," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 55, no. 2 (May, 2001): 298.
[208] Ibid., 304.
[209] Michael Hunter, *Science and Society*, passim.

visible by completing projects of outstanding nature. The various scientific branches practiced by the fellows well into the eighteenth century were clearly oriented towards grand scale projects. Robert Boyle's air pump, Christopher Wren's new Saint Paul, Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, Isaac Newton's law of universal gravitation, John Wilkins's plans for the invention of a new language, all share this common characteristic: they are grand projects aimed at handling the outstanding and the uncommon in order to settle an image of the Society as a promoter of relevant scientific work with applicability in the social field.

Of course, the special status of the microscopic specimen was equally caused by the spectacle that microscopic experiments provided. As pointed out by Michael Aaron Dennis, "Seventeenth-century microscopy was never a performance; it always lacked the immediacy of the air pump because using a microscope always required a representation, an interpretation, to move an observation from the realm of an individual's private experience to the status of public, verifiable knowledge."[210] Unable to reproduce experiments performed in laboratories, because the sighting of a microscopic specimen could not be (until the solar microscope was invented later in the eighteenth-century) a group experience, microscope demonstrators of the likes of Hooke, whose job description included regular demonstrations in front of the members of the Royal Society, were forced to construct a system of signs able to allow them exemplification and explanation. This need for representation can largely explain the technologies for the establishment of matters-of-fact discussed by Stephen Shapin and Simon Shaffer. It also explains the nature of microscopic observations of the kind published by Hooke and van Leeuwenhoek. Power, whose scientific activities were limited to his small circle of friends and virtuosi in Halifax and who never had to explain his conclusions to a large audience like the one at Gresham College, did not elaborate much on his observations. His system of signs is one based on textual quotations. His representations are not explicit but invite the reader to infer from an intricate vocabulary of metaphors the image they were willing to form about the specimen.

The grand size of specimens is also explained by the early microscopists' engagement with a manifest "defence of the small," which was translated into a reversal of the true figures of objects in order to give the minuscule the chance to participate in the discourse of the ostentatious. Reversibility is one of the most intriguing operations performed by

[210] Aaron, "Graphic Understanding," 319.

microscopes. Marc Olivier has signaled this as a metaphor for an instrument that confuses proportions and changes perceptions:

> As an instrument, or tool, the microscope dissolves boundaries, inverts hierarchies, radically alters scale and perception. The small things of the world become great, the great are abased. This new vision requires the reassessment of aesthetic sensibilities, philosophical understanding, theological belief and hierarchical norms.[211]

As Tita Chico rightly points out, the verve with which the scientists of the early modern period defended the world made visible by the microscope "betray[ed] a nervousness about [the minute world's] potentially trivial nature."[212] In the preface to his *Experimental Philosophy*, Henry Power referred unambiguously to the preferential treatment of the large animals in the works of earlier natural philosophers, to the detriment of the minuscule: "Ruder heads stand amazed at those prodigious and Colossean pieces of Nature, as Whales, Elephants, and Dromedaries; but in these narrow Engines there is more curious Mathematicks, and the Architecture of these little Fabricks more neatly set forth the wisdom of their Maker."[213] More inclined to excuse the preferences of natural philosophers, Hooke also counted on the ability of his instrument to create a parallel between the grand and the small, as "my little Objects are to be compar'd to the greater and more beautiful Works of Nature, A Flea, a Mite, a Gnat, to an Horse, an Elephant, or a Lyon."[214]

Enlargement of the subvisible may have also been prompted, as Lorraine Daston contends, by the scientists' intention to defend their work by elevating the specimens with which they worked: "Naturalists [...] accused of channelling their energies and emotions toward unworthy objects defended themselves by elevating their insects or phosphors or microscopic mites to the dignity of divine handiwork."[215] Such exercise in elevation was necessary because what was at stake was not only the nature of the specimens that attracted one's attention, but also the reputation of the observer. This operated in the same context of self-defensive techniques, in which the proper employments of attention could lend a significant hand. It was because of the general criticism built against scientific pursuits that early naturalists invested their efforts into

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[211] Olivier, "Binding the book of nature," 191.
[212] Tita Chico, "Minute Particulars: Microscopy and Eighteenth-Century Narrative," *Mosaic* 39, no. 2 (June, 2006): 147.
[213] Power, "Preface," in *Experimental Philosophy,* n.p.
[214] Hooke, "Preface," in *Micrographia,* n.p.
[215] Daston, "Attention," 105.

building an image of themselves as champions of a knowledge industry in its incipient stages. This image, Barbara Maria Stafford suggests, was caused by the threat to their image that these scientists received from professions that seemed to work in parallel with their own, but which in fact had different, less honest, agendas. Talking about "the legerdemain of experimentalists in all fields and the manoeuvres of the con man," Stafford explains that "the potential for fraud lurked in any demonstration in which the performer created the illusion of eyewitnessing without informing the beholder how the action was done."[216] If we look at the same aspect from Lorraine Daston's perspective on attention, the picture is very similar; only the stress shifts from disreputable activities to the high standards promoted through literature: "What distinguished genuine naturalists in the eyes of their peers was not professional status, but rather the practice of heroic observation, described as at once a talent, a discipline, and a method. None sufficed without the other. Attentive attention was firmly distinguished from mere seeing, and even from remarking upon."[217]

The threat of fraud and the promise of a heroic glory seem to have worked together towards the consolidation of the place occupied by microscopy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The discipline proved that the mediating role of technology, marked by the actual employment of an instrument, could excite the gaze through anticipation. The promise of newness prompted repeated attempts to penetrate beyond the surface of matter. In this respect, the project for the unveiling of the invisible was properly conducted. This explains the long history of the microscope as a tool for the satisfaction of curiosity. Curiosity, as well as voyeuristic pleasure, is an exercise that promises to leave the invisible unguarded, to use the aperture of the lens to bring the chaos of probability into the visibleness of jubilant events.

[216] Barbara Maria Stafford, *Objects of Desire,* 79.
[217] Daston, "Attention," 109.

SECTION TWO:

Keyholes

Vice is a monster of such frightful mein,
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen.
(Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*)

Argument

The present section is dedicated to an issue following, not without a certain logical sense, from microscopical observations. Transfer from the largely unacknowledged privacy of specimens to the socially defined privacy of humans caught in domestic postures is one worth pursuing, as it can offer matter for broadening the scope of discussions on the nature of invisibility in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England. I have chosen, for the present section, a very specific perspective, which has not been treated as such in scholarly literature. While keyholes always seem to be at the back of everybody's mind whenever the topic of privacy comes up, a sustained theoretical treatment has been surprisingly lacking. The only texts fully dedicated to some aspects of keyhole peeping are George E. Haggerty's "Keyhole Testimony: Witnessing Sodomy in the Eighteenth Century" (2003)[1] and Greta Olson's "Keyholes in Eighteenth-Century Novels as Liminal Spaces Between the Public and the Private Spheres" (2001).[2] Haggerty looks at (not *through*!) keyholes from the perspective of a very finely tuned subject, and for that reason his essay is less concerned with the device and more with representations of homosexuality. Because of its principal orientation, the essay lacks a sustained theoretical framework for a definition of keyhole peeping (although it makes some good arguments about the phenomenon) and deals primarily with a small handful of trial transcripts from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey, the prime source of information in the period with regards to juridical practices. Haggerty also alludes to novelistic representations of the act of witnessing sodomy, and stops, unsurprisingly, at *Fanny Hill,* which is the most obvious literary instantiation of scopic curiosity involving sodomy. While Haggerty's essay is very cogent and raises important issues which I will consider in the present section, I think that by and large it perpetuates the keyhole's taken-for-granted-ness by not proposing any historical or philosophical theory of keyhole testimony, and instead relying on the generalized impression that keyholes are intrinsically tied to issues of privacy, and therefore need little argumentation.

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[1] George E. Haggerty, "Keyhole Testimony: Witnessing Sodomy in the Eighteenth Century," *The Eighteenth Century* 44, no. 2/3 (2003): 167-182.

[2] Greta Olson, "Keyholes in Eighteenth-Century Novels as Liminal Spaces Between the Public and the Private Spheres," *Sites of Discourse – Public and Private Spheres – Legal Culture. Papers form a Conference Held at the Technical University of Dresden, December 2001*, ed. Uwe Böker and Julie A. Hibbard (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002): 151-165.

Greta Olson's essay, on the other hand, is almost exclusively focused on occurrences of the keyhole trope in eighteenth-century novels. *Fanny Hill* is mentioned in her text too, albeit briefly, but her major focus is on Richardson's *Clarissa*. While her essay is admirable for the widening of the pool of examples, the text reads more like a list of keyhole incidents and very little as an attempt at creating a theoretical foundation for a discussion on this conspicuous yet largely ignored topic, with roots both in literature and in jurisprudence.

I find a more solid theoretical foundation in an unpublished text, Shane Kyle Wilson's "'The Occasion of More Sin and Wickedness, than All Other Holes in This World Put Together': The Keyhole on Trial in 18th-Century England," an honours thesis written at Harvard in 2007, which the author generously shared with me. Because the text is unavailable in a published format, I have refrained from quoting it, however Wilson's thesis deserves mention. His argument is constructed around a reading of Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), a work which offered Wilson the possibility of placing keyholes against the backdrop of the development in the eighteenth-century of the distinction between privacy and publicity. Focusing more on the former, Wilson covers an impressive array of situations, his thesis addressing testimonies, servant inquisitiveness (which he sees as an act of theatrical significance in which the domestic servant appears in the position of a spectator), and also concerns related to household security and the locksmith's trade in the eighteenth century. His richly sourced text, however, is also largely constructed on a case-study pattern, leaving keyhole peeping largely untheorized.

My approach in the following section proposes first and foremost a discussion of the status of keyhole peeping in seventeenth and eighteenth-century English texts concerned with juridical matter, especially with the theory of evidence and the treatment of witnesses in criminal trials. My take on the topic has been motivated by a basic question I found myself asking in relation to trials in which keyholes featured as means of knowledge acquisition: isn't peeping an illegal action in itself, a form of breach of privacy? And, if so, why then did the court decisions I consider in this section never question the legality of the acquisition of incriminating facts?

The act of keyhole peeping was able to provide a wealth of significant information, which often led to serious consequences for the accused, going as far as the death sentences. The weight of such testimonies was, therefore, considerable. However, witnesses testifying on account of their peeping through keyholes or crevices present a

degree of reliability which seldom, if ever, makes their depositions questionable. To be fair, there are moments when one's access to a keyhole is inquired into by court personnel (judge, jury, prosecution), but those inquiries are not meant to cast doubt on the testimony. They are rather concerned with consolidating the deposition, by highlighting the fact that the keyhole could indeed afford perfect visual access to the events under scrutiny.

I found a possible answer to the dilemma expressed above in the difference in gravity between keyhole peeping or eavesdropping (recognized as illicit and punishable from as early as the thirteenth century) and offences indictable in criminal courts. Peeping into the privacy of others may have been a nuisance (as the legal term itself suggests), but was deemed insufficiently serious to require judgment by an authority such as the Courts of Assizes or the Quarter Sessions. It is for this reason that one will never find references for indictments for keyhole peeping or eavesdropping in the records of the Old Bailey, for instance, which was the central criminal court of England. Nuisances to privacy were not heard by these courts, which in the second half of the seventeenth century started to become specialized bodies of law; such indictments were issued, however, by smaller, local tribunals, such as manorial courts, or court leets, which had existed since the middle ages, and where the most common disputes were concerned with regulating agricultural activities and solving communal problems arising from the use of land or from commerce. Since I have had no access to such records, I could find no information as to the ways in which eavesdropping and keyhole peeping were punished in the period, but I was able to discover that common juridical practices did find nuisances of this type offensive and therefore eligible for penalties. Thus I found positive confirmation of my assumption that keyhole witnesses operated in awareness of the fact that their actions were illicit.

This conclusion is necessary to my argument because what follows in the present section is an account not only of keyhole peeping but also of the phenomenon of domestic curiosity. Touching on this topic, I raise questions as to the presence of servants in domestic settings. It seems that the curiosity of servants was motivated primarily by the indifference with which their presence was being regarded in the period. Organized under patriarchal authority, pre-modern servants were often invisible, and due to this invisibility could operate as veritable spies, peeking into intimate episodes of their masters' and mistresses' lives. This is where criminal trials become significant, because they provide strong evidence that domesticity was significantly shaped by the situation

and function of the invisible servant, who could, with a simple oral deposition, challenge the stability of an entire household.

Keyholes in seventeenth and eighteenth-century trial transcripts most immediately appear instantiations of the increased concern for privacy on the one hand, and of the equal counterweight of surveillance technologies on the other. One may be justified in drawing this conclusion, since keyhole peeping is a method of visual observation in which the observed is unaware of the observer's presence. It needs to be stressed from the very beginning that the beholder's relative freedom to act while the beheld remains ignorant of their presence perfectly resembles microscopical scrutiny, where manipulation of specimens was in no way restricted by anything other than the observer himself. A major precondition of any keyhole moment is that the person so beheld remains completely absorbed by the activity that he/she had been performing before, during, and even after the appearance of the inquisitive viewer. In this respect, keyhole peeping, like microscopical observation, could be said to function in a chronological frame parallel to that of the person who constitutes the object of looking. While the time coordinates of the two occurrences remain simultaneous (both the observer and the observed inhabit the same time slot, as in the narrative technique of simultaneity in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*), the matter of space turns out to be a collation of two distinct settings, separated by a thin surface the role of which is to keep the two from becoming one. In contrast to microscopy, where the simple difference in nature of the viewer and viewed impede confusion, keyhole peeping preserves an essential charge of surveillance. Here, the objects of the beholder's gaze are not inanimate or subhuman species regarded as ontologically inferior (because incapable of emotions) and therefore susceptible to any form of violence, optical or physical. Now, what is being contemplated are the activities of living human beings caught in the act of performing private gestures.

There might be a problem in bringing surveillance into a discussion of keyhole peeping, the nature of which lies in an apparent chronological incongruity. Surveillance as such (the technology of state apparatuses that ensure the subjection of citizens) only emerged in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Articulated by Jeremy Bentham's panopticist design of the ideal prison, according to Foucault, this was already an environment in which police as an institution of state repression had been consolidated, and in which the secularized political milieu had made room for the intervention of lay apparatuses of control and regulation. The panopticon, for Foucault, reveals surveillance to be a mechanism of governance, or governmentality, whereby the state required its

subjects' acknowledgment of the discourse of power and their replication of that power in techniques for self-regulation.

As always, however, ways could be found to circumvent chronological exactitudes, since concepts and practices do not necessarily evolve according to the geometrical figure of the straight line. Keyholes provide the proof that prying into the privacy of individuals was, if not entirely a means of exercising control over them, then at least a clear manifestation of the will to do justice: to do justice to the beholder, who in many situations might have been concerned with nothing but the correction of an imbalance in social hierarchies; to do justice to the social scene in which the observation took place; and mostly, to do justice to justice. My argument in the following section is that the juridical system in place from the second half of the seventeenth century and up until the turn of the nineteenth depended on the existence, function, and materialisation of the threat to privacy represented by keyholes.

Keyholes are technological devices that allow acquisition of knowledge which is subsequently consumed in public. Boswell, in his *Life of Johnson*, recalls an account given him by David Garrick (the actor and playwright), who had been pupil to Johnson in the latter's academy set up near Lichfield, Staffordshire, when he was in his late twenties. Garrick related that the only three students attending the academy (himself, his brother George, and Lawrence Offrey) had the curious habit of spying upon their teacher to gain sight of his tender gestures towards Mrs. Johnson:

> His oddities of manner, and uncouth gesticulations, could not but be the subject of merriment to them; and, in particular, the young rogues used to listen at the door of his bed-chamber, and peep through the key-hole, that they might turn into ridicule his tumultuous and awkward fondness for Mrs. Johnson, whom he used to name by the familiar appellation of Tetty or Tetsey, which, like Betty or Betsey, is provincially used as a contraction for Elisabeth, her Christian name, but which to us seems ludicrous, when applied to a woman of her age and appearance. Mr. Garrick described her to me as very fat, with a bosom of more than ordinary protuberance, with swelled cheeks of a florid red, produced by thick painting, and increased by the liberal use of cordials; flaring and fantastick in her dress, and affected both in her speech and her general behaviour.[3]

The keyhole in this instance allowed the pupils to upset, at least for a while, the publicly visible hierarchy regulating the distance between them and their teacher. The sight of intimate events throws the protagonist of such episodes into the open, where his image is

[3] James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 71.

no longer the result of his self-construction, but the effect of the works of others. Johnson's authority can be said to have been undermined since his official role was based on conventions of visibleness which discarded any considerations of his private deeds. The young peeping toms recuperated the absence marked by Johnson's privatization of his body, which had left a gap in the visible part of his identity, that is, in that part which could be perceived through his public appearance. By looking through the keyhole, his students could easily complete the picture of Dr Johnson by adding to it that missing piece which they acquired without his assent. The look, which was shared among the three pupils and possibly carried on into small-scale gossip, offered a convenient way of dismantling the imbalance of roles that characterized their relationship with the instructor, in which they were largely disenfranchised.

The assumption that servants (like Johnson's students) may have used the keyhole as an avenue for the correction of their social frustrations can be regarded as generative of concrete methods for the retrieving of the invisible. Courts and trials afforded them a perfect stage, where they could perform and publicize, unsanctioned, information restricted to the immediate perimeter of the household. In order to see this how this occurred, I need first to outline the keyhole in its immediate context.

Chapter 4. Keyholes and Law

The legal status of keyholes

To start with a question: how did the seventeenth and eighteenth-century legal system see intrusion into privacy by means of visual or auditory spying? William Blackstone, the most prominent figure among eighteenth-century authors of juridical compilations, mentions eavesdropping as a nuisance: "Eaves-droppers, or such as listen under walls or windows, or the eaves of a house, to hearken after discourse, and thereupon to frame slanderous and mischievous tales, are a common nuisance and presentable at the court-leet: or are indictable at the sessions, and punishable by fine and finding sureties for the good behavior."[4] The definition is, obviously, applicable to keyhole peeping as well, since the nature of the offence is identical (obtaining information by means of illicit access to the privacy of another).

Cases against eavesdroppers would not have reached Courts of Assizes or Quarter Sessions, which were concerned with criminal matters of gravity. Eavesdropping, as a nuisance, is a common law tort. Torts were (and are) civil wrongs, and therefore a claim in tort could be brought through a lawsuit to a civil panel. While assizes and quarter sessions could hear lawsuits, they were more likely to delegate the responsibility. In other words, they would have passed lesser offences onto the so-called manor courts, operating at local level and dealing with non-indictable offences (misdemeanor) for the hearing of which there was no need for a highly specialized body of justice, and where the entire authority was that of the appointed steward of the lord of the manor. In East Sussex, for

[4] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England in Four Books,* 2 vols. (New York: W.E. Dean, 1840), vol. II, 128.

instance, "manorial and communal courts met regularly but most of their business involved minor debts, citations for brewing and the trespass of animals."[5]

The nuisance of eaves-dropping had been recognized by the English juridical system since at least the first Statute of Westminster (1275), where reference to it was made in Chapter 33. John Kitchin, a sixteenth-century jurist specialized in the operations of the lesser courts, made mention of it in his *Le Covrt Leete, et Court Baron*. Principles laid down by him were still observed in the second half of the seventeenth century, when a number of translations (under the title *Jurisdictions*) were made after the mixed French, Latin and English original of 1580. Insofar as illicit listening was concerned, Kitchin's account read: "Also if any Ease-droppers [sic], which stand under Walls, or Windows, by night or day, to hear Tales, and to carry them to others, to make strife and debate among their Neighbours, present their names."[6]

As made apparent by the entry in Kitchin's compilation, the offence of eaves-dropping was acknowledged, but would have barely caused any serious trouble to the offender. One may note here the overlooking of the fact that keyhole peeping was a transgression of privacy. Servants must have been very sensitive to petty crimes in the eighteenth century, as any brush with the law would have been recorded in a servant's character description, on which future employments depended, yet they did not shy away from the thought of employing keyhole testimonies in a criminal case, where the gravity of the action under observation was far higher than that of covert listening or watching.

Ann Gaylin explains that "[t]he word 'eavesdropping' implies placement of a listener in space."[7] The etymology of the word indicates a place under the eaves overhanging from a house, where pluvial water would collect. This is the first meaning given to the verb 'to eavesdrop' in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*: "To catch what comes from the eaves." Johnson mentions the other sense of the word as originating in common parlance, and attaches to the definition of the noun 'eavesdropper' a quote from Shakespeare's *Richard III,* V.5:

> Under our tents I'll play the eavesdropper

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[5] Cytnthia B. Herrup, *The Common Peace. Participation and Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 43.

[6] John Kitchin, *Jurisdictions: Or, the Lawful Authority of Courts Leet, Courts Baron, Court of Marshalseys, Court of Pypowder, and Ancient Demesn*. (London, 1675), 20.

[7] Ann Gaylin, *Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austen to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

To hear if any mean to shrink from me.[8]

Here, eavesdropping is clearly counted as an illicit gesture, since Richard is known for the fact that he rules by means of terror ("He hath no friends but who are friends for fear. / Which in his greatest need will shrink from him").[9] His plan to listen furtively is a way to control his subjects by gaining access to their secret thoughts about him.

To return to the dictionary definition of eavesdropping, the ground covered by the eaves represents a location where a person could stand, close to the wall, to protect themselves from rain. This space is neither in the house (if we consider the house to be the interior of the building) nor outside it (since the eaves are extensions of the roof). For that reason, it "represents liminality: not being fully a part of the private world, but somewhat protected, while still part of the natural and public world. In its very demarcation, this border state presupposes the trespass of another individual's sense of private space."[10]

Keyholes are also sites of in-betweenness, where liminality is even more pronounced. "Keyholes signify liminality in that they are neither full nor open spaces," says Greta Olson in her essay on novelistic instances of peeping.[11] The demarcation between private inside and public outside presents no ambiguity: there is a door with a keyhole in it, the purpose of which is to allow that door to be locked in order to keep others from entering. Nothing to be negotiated insofar as the original purpose of the keyhole is concerned. But it is precisely this taken-for-granted-ness that becomes problematic. Keyholes were never just means of protection; they were also ways into the house. Locksmiths of the eighteenth century were fully aware of the problem raised by this device. As Joseph Bramah, a late-century tradesman who published in the 1780s a booklet entitled *A Dissertation on the Construction of Locks,* remarked:

> It is observable that those, who are taken in the desperate occupation of house-breaking, are always furnished with a number and variety of keys, or

[8] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language; in which the words are deduced from their originals and illustrated in their significations by examples from the best writers*, 2 vols. (London: 1755), vol. I, n.p. The quote from Richard III can be found in Burton Raffel 2008 annotated edition of the play (see next note), 182.
[9] William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. Burton Raffel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 171.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Greta Olson, "Keyholes in Eighteenth-Century Novels as Liminal Spaces Between the Public and Private Spheres," in *Sites of Discourse – Public and Private Spheres – Legal Culture. Papers form a Conference Held at the Technical University of Dresden, December 2001,* ed. Uwe Böker and Julie A. Hibbard (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), 163.

> other instruments, adapted to the purpose of picking, or opening Locks; and it needs no argument to prove, that these instruments must be essential to the execution of their intentions; for unless they can secure access to the portable and most valuable part of the effects, which in most families are deposited under the *imaginary security* of Locks, the plunder would seldom recompence [sic] the difficulty, and hazard of the enterprize; and till some method of security be adopted by which such keys and instruments may be rendered useless, no effectual check or opposition can be given to the excessive, and alarming practice of house-breaking.[12]

The statement must be taken with a grain of salt, given that Bramah was advertising a new locking system of his own creation. However, it stands as a good illustration of the eighteenth-century awareness that keyholes were far from infallible with regards to securing privacy. As a French treatise on the art and craft of locksmiths put it, "Openings into walls are necessary to make doors to enter and windows to illuminate the apartments. But it is also necessary that these openings be impracticable to those who want to loot what we have secured inside."[13] Every facility with its shortcoming suggests a conclusion containing a problem, which locksmiths were prepared to remedy.

Bramah did not exaggerate when he mentioned forceful entrances into unattended houses, one of the most common forms of crime, requiring, in many cases, good knowledge of keys and keyholes. Jack Sheppard, the notorious eighteenth-century outlaw, apparently gained his success in the trade of housebreaking due to his excellent skills as a carpenter and locksmith.[14] John Fielding (Henry's younger half-brother) found that the entry by key and lock was very highly praised among the methods preferred by house thieves, second only to "the crack," a method whereby the burglar would force window shutters or doors open with a crowbar. Named "the dub," after the slang for a master key, the method made victims of negligent house owners or tenants, "as there are very few who have no other security than a lock after they go to rest."[15] The best remedy Fielding could find for this method was to leave a servant in the house whenever the house owners were abroad, in order to deter any possible intruders. This confirmed the fact that keys and locks did not discourage burglary. And, to eradicate any hopes that reliable means of securing one's property could be found, Fielding announced for all to

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[12] Joseph Bramah, *A Dissertation on the Construction of Locks* (London: Printed for the author, 1785?), 5.
[13] Duhamel du Monceau, *Art du serrurier* (Paris: 1767), 62. My translation.
[14] Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 27.
[15] John Fielding, *Thieving Detected: Being a True and Particular Description, of the Various Methods and Artifices, Used by Thieves and Sharpers, to Take in and Deceive the Public* (London: Printed for the author, 1777), 9.

know that "a Sneak can, with the help of his Betty (an instrument turned up at one end like a hook) open almost any lock in England."[16]

Such situations appear to confirm the point made by Amanda Vickery, who argues, on the basis of the similarities between house and human body (often marked symbolically and ritually), that "the weak points of the house were its orifices: the doorway, the windows, the chimney and hearth," all of them important paths into a building, but at the same time vital to its functioning, since "without them a house was an airless prison."[17] The flow of privacy depended largely on this double treatment of the domestic circulatory system, and more importantly, on the possibility that it could be transformed from a safety tool into a channel of intrusion.

Again, keyholes were not explicitly mentioned in juridical treatises, their role being somewhat deduced from the similarity with eaves-dropping, the two being identical in their legal nature (as nuisances) and their effects (as intrusions). In the court leet of the manor of Manchester, the definition of eaves-dropping is carried on from legal compendia in use during the entire period between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. A set of sixteenth-century instructions for the steward of the lord of the manor (the person who would have chaired the court, playing the role of a judge), read (in a nineteenth-century rendition):

> Also you shall inquire of eaves-droppers, and those are such as by night stand or lie hearkening under walls or windows of other men, to hear what is said in another man's house, to the end to set debate and discussion between neighbours, which is a very ill office; therefore, if you know any such, present them."[18]

This account preserves all the elements of the previous definitions given to the term "eavesdropping." There is, however, an emphasis on the gravity of the fact, made apparent not only by the phrase "very ill office," but also by the fact that eavesdropping is now said to be an exclusively nocturnal activity. The reference to daylight in Kitchin's account is dropped and consequently the nuisance takes on a more mysterious gloss, with a potentially increased suggestion of danger.

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[16] Ibid., 27.

[17] Amanda Vickery, "An Englishman's Home is His Castle? Thresholds, Boundaries and Privacies in the Eighteenth-Century London House," *Past and Present* 199 (May 2008): 153.

[18] John Harland, ed., *A Volume of Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester in the Sixteenth Century* (Printed for the Chetham Society, 1864), 38.

However, it needs to be said that keyhole peeping had a special status in relation to its employment in criminal courts. In spite of its indictment at court manors, the practice passed largely unnoticed when found in witnesses' depositions at civil or criminal courts at a higher level. When questions were formulated about the keyhole, it became apparent that the reason was not some suspicion aroused by the witness, but rather the willingness to consolidate the status of the keyhole as a reliable source of information.

In the trial for Crim. Con. (adultery) against Richard Lyddel, the jury insisted on asking the witness (Elizabeth Hopping, a servant) questions relevant to the framing of the keyhole at the heart of her deposition:

> Being ask'd, whether there was any Key in the Key-hole of the Lock that she peeped through, or any other Covering to it within side? Replied, there was not, neither there was any Thing to hinder her from looking. Being ask'd, whether the Door she look'd throu was lock'd? Replied, that she knew nothing of that, but the Key was out, for they had been cleaning the Locks.[19]

The jury needed, in this case, to establish the integrity of the account and be reassured they wanted to know if the keyhole had been free of any obstructions. Its simple presence did not guarantee the proper functioning of the device. Like all technological apparatuses, it had to be tested, in order to assess reliability. Without a clear sight of the events taking place inside the room, the witness would be dismissed as unreliable. The impression left by this account is that the most important factor was establishing credibility. However, the credibility debated here is not that of the witness, but that of the instrument. Accepted as testimony in court, the account given by the servant had already passed the test of validity, and needed only the confirmation that the keyhole was, indeed, able to provide the witness with sufficient visibility. With the reply, the test was once again passed, and the keyhole found to be confirmed in its probity.

Situations like this, however, were very rare. As a rule, the use of keyholes did not cause suspicion among court personnel, who heard the witness without any question as to the intention behind their decision to take the crucial peek. Because of this, the keyhole was a star among technologies of witnessing. Cases in which it was involved ranged from adultery to sodomy, rape and robbery, all considered to be seriously transgressive and therefore in need of solid visual proof. When a reason was presented by the witness for their intrusion, usually curiosity or suspicion popped up. To these was

19 *An Account of the Tryal of Richard Lyddel, Esq; at His Majesty's Court of Common-Pleas, Before the Right Honourable Lord-Chief-Justice Eyre, for Carrying on a Criminal Conversation with the late lady Abergavenny; on Monday the 16th of February, 1729/30* (London: Printed for A. Moore, 1730), 4.

added a somehow heightened civic spirit, translated into a peculiar care for the pursuit of order and legality.

London Chronicle relates, in its 1157th issue, of "one Jennings, a journeyman barber, charged with stealing, out of a house of a gentleman in Surrey-street in the Strand, eight shirts, several neckcloths, and other things."[20] According to the brief account published in the paper, the thief, freshly "committed to New Prison," had been taking advantage of one of his customers whom he used to shave three times a week. Lured by the open drawers and the general negligence of his customer, "this genius," as the paper calls him, would take advantage of the man's face being covered in lather to slip into his pockets the items mentioned in the opening sentence. Not being able to discover the perpetrator, the deprived owner began to suspect a maid servant in his household. The maid, knowing her innocence, decides to take matters into her own hands and, "she being conscious of no other person having access into the room but the barber and herself, took an opportunity, the next time he came to shave her master, to watch him through the keyhole, by which she detected him."[21] Disclosure of the scheme sent the perpetrator into prison and allowed the maid to regain her trust.

The conclusion I draw from this account is that the actual act of peeping was preceded by a strong suspicion, a form of knowledge possessed by the viewer that there must have been something more going on than met the eye. The viewer was strangely conscious of concealed information, hidden fact, or, in other words, of the presence of something allegedly invisible. Unveiling the mystery that shrouded the event was a matter of visualizing that event, represented as being completely out of sight. But in order to make the crucial discovery, the servant herself had to perform an intrusive act, by peering into the privacy of an event which was not meant for her eyes. The breaking of the code of privacy was, for this reason, a manifestation of her curiosity. Curiosity, as Barbara M. Benedict explains, "is always transgressive, always a sign of the rejection of the known as inadequate, incorrect, even uninteresting."[22] This brief definition matches perfectly the case mentioned above. It also explains the determination of many witnesses to get hold of the view at the keyhole, or its equivalent, an aspect made apparent especially when obstructions were encountered.

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[20] *London Chronicle*, May 19-22 (London: 1764): 483.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 4.

In 1733, William Collins, a London carpenter, was accused by Mary Beaumont of having stolen a silver watch from her house, to which the accused responded in court by delivering a story that threw the blame upon the plaintiff. Beaumont, he argued in his deposition, had given the watch to an "old gentleman" in exchange for sexual services. Here is the account of William Collins: "About three an elderly Gentleman came up and went into her Room. Presently the Door was shut and a Cloth hung over the Key-hole. But some of us looking thro' a Crevice in the Partition, observed some odd Passages between the old Man and her."[23] The story was then confirmed by one of Collins's colleagues, who had been present at the scene. The deposition of Hugh Meers, much more detailed insofar as "odd Passages" are concerned, makes reference to the same obstructed keyhole and the curiosity that had driven the witnesses to the door:

> I thought some Game was going forward, and so I looked at the Key-Hole, but something was hung before it within Side. Then we found out a Crevice, and through that we could see 'em plainly. She was sitting in a Chair, and he stood before her. He thrust his Hand down her Bosom, and then up her Coats; she took out what she could find, and play'd with it, while the old Boy bill'd her, as if he would have eaten her up. After he was gone, she came into our Room, and we began to run the rig upon her, about what we had seen, and I call'd her ----- and -----, which made her so angry, that she swore I and Gandy had stole the Watch. But when the Prisoner came up she charged it upon him.[24]

The evidence brought in support of their case eventually gained the acquittal of Collins. But what interests me here is the mechanism of curiosity. This is because the curiosity that stands at the basis of these depositions is also heavily spiced with voyeuristic implications. "An outlaw impulse," Barbara M. Benedict explains, "curiosity feeds on gossip, absorbing the knowledge of others. It embodies the anticipatory fury of desire, and desire, by its very nature, remains unsatisfied and ambitious for something more."[25] Suspecting that something of a sexual nature was happening inside which they wanted to witness because of the pleasure that could be derived from the sight, the first impulse of the viewers in the preceding account is to approach the keyhole. It is a straightforward recognition of the passage as a site of knowledge acquisition. When the keyhole fails to fulfill its function, the viewers' attention turns to the conspicuous crevice. From the detailed account they make of the sexual intercourse one can conclude that the crevice

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[23] William Billers, *The Proceedings at the Sessions of the Peace, and Oyer and Terminer, for the City of London, and County of Middlesex* (London, 1733): 92-93.
[24] Ibid., 93.
[25] Benedict, *Curiosity*, 25.

was an equally affordable visual site. Yet the crevice was not their first option. This does not mean that the keyhole was a preferred option. It shows, however, that the keyhole was unanimously recognized as a site where one could satisfy one's curiosity by acquiring knowledge of private actions (at least in theory). With regards to the eighteenth century, Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that curiosity "encouraged penetration into feelings and events that persons might prefer to conceal."[26] The carpenters went straight to the door not because the keyhole would have afforded a better view of the scene, but because the keyhole provided an acceptable passage between the public and the private, and with it, the promise of visual penetration. The sexual content of the entire event is once more confirmed. Yet nobody in the trial seems to have been concerned with the illicitness of the carpenters' behavior. There are signs in the account that the court was somehow aware of the woman's ill reputation, and therefore, the greatest weight was given to the men (especially after having corroborated their individual depositions).

A further important aspect of keyhole testimonies can be taken from this account: the fact that the 'victim' of the event, that is, the person who is being watched, often renders himself or herself visible to the outside. It is a form of exhibitionism that invites voyeurs by making the spectacle available to them. One notes that the apartment of Mary Beaumont mentioned above is literally riddled with holes and crevices, of which she must have been well aware, since she was the inhabitant of the place.

The narrative of the incidents recounted in this particular document is charged with sexual connotations throughout. It is not just the witnessing of the act that draws one's attention, but also a series of insistent sexual allusions passed between the male defendant and his working mates, and the female plaintiff, who is said to have visited them a number of times throughout the day, responding often to their 'cheeky' interpellations and even to blatant propositions. Thus, she had already invited the viewers to behave intrusively, and when they did so the hole in the wall became known to all the participants in the event (maybe with the only exception of the "old gentleman," who, from this perspective, can be said to have been the only true 'victim' of the entire occasion). One is reminded here of the first book of Pietro Arretino's sixteenth-century *Ragionamenti*, which features a series of events taking place in a nunnery. The narrator, herself engaged in an outstanding sexual adventure, spends long hours in a cell surrounded by four other small rooms in which various forms of copulation between an

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[26] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5.

impressive number of interchangeable characters are taking place. All these adjacent scenes are spectacles which the character-narrator witnesses through holes in the partitioning walls. It is immediately evident that the actors in the scenes watched by the narrator are aware of the presence of those holes and, even though they don't manifest any obvious interest in 'communicating' with the viewer, they perform their roles as self-exhibitions in which the pleasure resides not only in the sexual act *per se*, but also in the fact that the characters make themselves observable.[27]

It would be misleading to say that keyhole testimonies were primarily concerned with sexual matters, although a great proportion of them do provide accounts of what is customarily identified as self-gratifying sexual voyeurism. The employment of the keyhole could also be presented as an incalculable benefit to the judicial system, since it could penetrate even where the law had erred. The apprehension of Paul Liddy, "the notorious Munster highwayman" is a case in point. In the London's *Daily Journal* of January 4, 1729, we are briefly told of his apprehension in an undisclosed location. Five days later, the information is contradicted by the longer account of an eyewitness who had seen Liddy while peeping through a keyhole in a hotel room where he was allegedly lodged. The scene involves a "Drawer" who "peep'd thro' his Keyhole" to discover the highwayman, whom he seems to have previously met and therefore could be trusted to recognize.

The information gained through the keyhole is often employed in a social network of knowledge formation and transmission. The Lyddel trial reveals this in an almost hilarious chain of knowledge transmission from the source observer to subsequent persons whose role will be to spread the information even further. Of the key witness in the trial, Elizabeth Hopping, we are told that, subsequent to the witnessing of the criminal conversation between the defendant and the plaintiff's wife, "as soon as she could get out, she went and acquainted one of the Fellow Servants, which was the Laundery Maid, that she had seen her Lady with Mr. Lydden against her, with her

[27] Pietro Aretino, *Aretino's Dialogues,* tr. Raymond Rosenthal (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972). Another useful parallel may be drawn with the fourteenth-century "Miller's Tale" in Chaucer's collection of *Canterbury Tales,* where a scene witnessed through a crevice in the wall is nothing but a set-up meant to delude the cuckolded husband. The significance of the scene in Chaucer resides in the fact that the character being witnessed is aware that the other character is watching him. His feigned absorption (by sitting in the middle of the room unmoved, as though he had been struck by madness, he manages to arouse the husband's curiosity) is linked to the presence of the crevice, which wrongly suggests to the viewer a tableau in which the actor is not aware of the beholder's presence (Michael Fried's "absorption" by the book).

Petticoats up, and told her, she thought he was debouching her Lady."[28] A few lines further down we learn that the laundry maid, Elizabeth Letchmere, also passed the information to one "Mr. Osbourn," who is not mentioned in the account but who is certainly an important link in the process of socialization of information itself constitutes the case.[29]

In the newspaper account of the Philadelphia murder of Benjamin Burden related in the *London Evening Post*, the enlargement of the event's social environment features prominently. After having seen the horrible murder taking place in the quarters of the tavern owner, the witness's first reaction is to inform his companion. The information is thus transferred from the privacy of the enclosed room to the viewer and hence to a third person who thus enlarges the social environment in which the event is evaluated and amended. "[H]e call'd his Companion and ran into the Neighbourhood to get Assistance, who coming suddenly upon the Tavern-keeper, seiz'd him whilst he was burying the body in his Garden: he was immediately carry'd before a Justice, who committed him to Goal."[30]

What such narratives illustrate is the wide use of keyholes in the equally conspicuous search for knowledge concerning domestic secrets. All these accounts were given by witnesses, which formed the core of the English criminal trial, and around whom the entire philosophy of jurisprudence was organized. In order to understand what had made keyholes so ubiquitous in testimonies, we need to see what it meant, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to be a witness at all. This itself requires some pre-history.

[28] Ibid., 3.
[29] Ibid., 4.
[30] *London Evening Post*, January 20, 1737.

The seventeenth century was characterized by an amalgamated way of dealing with laws and their applications. J. S. Cockburn puts it in a nutshell: criminal trials were "nasty, brutish, and essentially short. Their rapidity, allowing a single judge in the 1620s to process fifty Crown cases in a working day, was a prominent and constant feature." Not only were procedures cumbersome and primitive, but assizes (places in various towns where itinerant judges sat periodically to hear cases of serious gravity commissioned by the local Quarter Sessions) represented significant health risks to attendants, as well as a launching pad for the inappropriate behavior of some judges, and for their prejudiced decisions. Discharging guns in the courtroom, or starting a brawl right under the judge's eyes, were common incidents.[31]

After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, James II reorganized the juridical system, but in spite of his declared intention to reform a manifestly inadequate system, his actions were largely biased by religious and political principles. Catholics were appointed as judges and sheriffs, and he revived the Court of High Commission, the supreme ecclesiastical court disbanded in 1641 by order of Parliament. In tune with the former authoritarian measures represented by monarchy before the execution of Charles I, James reinstated absolutist policies. In matters of justice, "he claimed, not merely a right to dispense with laws in particular cases, but a general power of suspending entirely the operation of a statute."[32] James's reforms in justice were revoked by William and Mary, who, among other measures, promulgated the Bill of Rights, designed to reinstate ancient civil rights and to deny monarchy the privilege to intervene in the business of justice in order to suspend laws at will. The first steps were thus made towards the independence of judges, who were no longer seen as dispensable by the Crown, but reassured of the stability of their position, provided they showed good behavior.[33]

The powers gained by Parliament were consolidated in the first decades of the eighteenth century, while further changes were made to widen the gap between monarchy and those charged with dispensing justice in the Kingdom. However, in spite of the fact

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[31] J. S. Cockburn, *A History of English Assizes 1558-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 109.
[32] W. J. V. Windeyre, *Lectures on Legal History,* 2nd ed. (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane: The Law Book Company of Australasia, 1957), 220.
[33] Ibid., 222.

that updates of criminal and civil laws were necessary (common law and its proper institutions were organized in accordance with medieval principles), the early eighteenth century was marked by little improvements. In fact, whatever changes were made, the juridical system was only made tougher than it had been.

> Benefit of clergy was removed from a number of felonies and many new felonies were created without benefit of clergy. The result was an appalling number of criminal offences, many of them of a trivial character. It was a capital offence to steal to the amount of forty shillings from a dwelling house, or to pick a pocket to a greater amount than twelve pence. For such crimes men, women, and children were hanged or transported. Misdemeanors were variously punishable, sometimes by imprisonment, sometimes by transportation, sometimes by whipping. Offenders were set in the pillory, to be tormented by brutal mobs, or whipped at the tail of a cart.[34]

As a result of these measures, jurymen who intended to save convicted individuals from the scaffold were often false to their oaths. Moreover, English juridical system saw "the development of a rule that, in criminal trials, the utmost strictness of proof and the exact observance of all technicalities and rules of evidence should be required."[35] Application of law prescripts thus became a matter of speculation rather than one of search for truth, in a system marked by intense ritualisation, where, until the systematized approach of William Blackstone, "the law of England had been accessible only in meager reports or in crabbed treatises, written by men better acquainted with law than with their mother tongue."[36]

Improvements were, therefore, not readily visible in the fief of justice, at least not with respect to procedural matters. Eavesdropping was still regarded in the antiquated way of the thirteenth-century statute of Westminster. In fact, as a whole, "the eighteenth century did not see dramatic changes in the law of nuisance."[37] It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Blackstone still mentions eavesdropping in his books, in the same obscure and insufficiently defined manner, only as a point to be made in a work of compilation (at the end of the day, eavesdropping seems to have been least noxious to the public realm).

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[34] Ibid., 227.
[35] Ibid.
[36] F.C. Montague, "Introduction," *A Fragment on Government* by Jeremy Bentham, ed. F.C. Montague (Union, New Jersey: The Lawbook Exchange, 2001), 58.
[37] James Oldham, *The Mansfield Manuscripts and the Growth of English Law in the Eighteenth Century* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), vol. II, 882.

To Derrida, the act of bearing witness is an instance of self-narration: "A testimony is always given in the first person."[38] The narrative nature of any deposition rests on the statement that a witness makes about themselves. From that perspective, testimony is autobiographical, but not in the sense required by literature. Self-narration in front of a jury, a judge, and a larger audience is a live performance. It emerges in this context as a personal form of compliance with the regulation of the space that contains the act of justice, while at the same time telling a truth about one's experience (a limited experience, for the life of the witness is of no importance to the court, unless it fits within the rigorous criteria of relevance). "[T]he witness must both conform to given criteria and at the same time invent, in quasi-poetic fashion, the norms of his attestation," Derrida contends.[39] There is a bipolarity in the witness's performance, a game of balances, at which he/she is expected to be a perfect player. This duality is also present in the differential handling of the verbal (and narrative) tenses of testimonial utterances. The deposition is an event taking place in the present. It unfolds in front of the audience, while the audience hears it first-hand (thus, they are themselves eye- and ear-witnesses to the deposition; thus, the witness becomes witnessed). For this reason, testimonies must be concerned with satisfying the exigencies of the present moment, which is the moment in which the event of bearing witness erupts as a disruption. What is disrupted is the calm monotony of visibleness. Without the testimony, nothing exceptional happens. The courtroom is shrouded in the quietness of reassurance that this (the court, the case, the audience) is a site where justice (the all-powerful justice) exists, where it is embodied in every detail of the setting, in every gesture, in every word. There cannot be anything here without a reference to justice. If a party in the process utters words without relevance, he/she is sanctioned. He/she is thus reminded that this is a site of justice. When the testimony is produced, however, this calm is dispelled, because testimony comes from another place: it precedes the manifestation of justice embodied in this place, in this courtroom. Testimony is a narrative concerned with an event, another disruptive event

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[38] Jacques Derrida, Jacques, "Demeure: Fiction and Testimony," in *The Instant of my Death*, by Maurice Blanchot. *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony,* by Jacques Derrida, tr. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 38.
[39] Derrida, 40.

from the past. It is therefore necessary to introduce the past tense in the narration. And indeed, all testimonies are presented in the past tense: "I peep'd through the Key-hole, and saw him – and – and –."[40] Or: "We went from Home about One in the Afternoon, and walked together to *Westminster-Abbey*, and there we saw what was to be seen." Or: "I was going over the Market when I saw *Wilson* running, I laid hold of him." Or: "I saw the deceased the night before he died."[41]

Moreover, the bipolar nature of depositions can be found in the peculiar disjunction between the witnessed space and the testified space. Due to the juridical mechanisms of sifting and fanning information, the deposition cannot be *of* everything. Just like fiction, which cannot be *fiction* without being selective, courtroom testimony must tell the essential apart from the accidental. But this, of course, puts another strain on the testifier, who is always tempted to say more than what is absolutely necessary, that is, tempted to transform his or her testimony into a true act of autobiography. One might wonder if this act of bearing witness is not somehow the expression of the witness's desire to produce fiction, to make themselves inhabitants of the realm of literature.

In legal terms, fiction means an exception made in court in order to align a set of given circumstances to a context that is anterior, exterior, and independent of it. The citationality of law is what makes it adaptable to any new situation without losing the authority to decide and to draw conclusions. In common law, deliberation is constructed not around acts of legislation, but according to a body of precedent. Law, in the sense of written proscriptions produced by the legislative authority, is suspended in common law hearings. Ruling is weighed up through reference to the history of the practice rather than to citation of written law. Thus, a decision at common law contains in itself a quote, a reference to a past moment. Once again, law is faced with a bipolar predicament based on the distinction between present and past: between the letter of the law, which transgresses all individual instances and is, for that reason, forever present, forever reflexive (it acts on the spot, indeed on *any* spot), and the historicity of the law, which is reflective, requiring consultation of a precedent, and depending on the accuracy and relevance of that precedent in order to exist).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth-century theory and practice of justice, citationality moved the stress from substantive law (encoded in statutes) to adjective law (idiosyncrasies of court procedures). In consequence, as Christopher Allen points out,

[40] *Select trials for murders, robberies, rapes, sodomy, coining, Frauds, And other Offences: at the Session-House in the Old-Bailey* (London: 1734-35), vol. II, 244.
[41] Ibid., 12, 103, 309.

"reasoning was displaced by imitation."[42] Just as today (are we not the direct descendants of Enlightenment?), references to precedents constituted the substance of trials at common law. Edmund Heward summarizes very well the way in which this emphasis operated in the period in order to facilitate the work of the judge, jury, and prosecution, all of which were endowed with various degrees of authority permitting them to alter the course of a trial and to make decisions regarding the defendant:

> In the early days of the common law a plaintiff had to decide which writ to use to start his action and his search was for the right pigeonhole. This attitude of mind has persisted among English lawyers, who no longer have to find a specific writ but seek for a precedent to cover their case. Owing to the variety of human experience it is likely that such a precedent cannot be found and the lawyer is forced to find another similar precedent and argue by way of analogy. Strict search for precedent provides no absolute certainty because the difficulties of the search become more acute as precedents proliferate.[43]

The so-called 'rule of law' was, in fact, the rule of the 'law of evidence,' the purpose of which was to regulate the citizen's access to the sites of justice and to the juridical discourses that such sites embodied. Voices were raised, especially in the second half of the eighteenth century, against this discretionary method. William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield, Lord Chief Justice from late 1750s to late 1780s, who reformed procedural matters in order to allow for a speedier handling of trials, thought that "precedent, though it be evidence of law, is not law in itself."[44] The greatest contribution Mansfield brought to the development of common law in England was precisely the shift of emphasis from procedural inductions to a practice based on principles respected by all judges in equal measure.

Witnesses represented one of the most important constituents of the theory and practice of jurisprudence: "[T]the common law was [in the area of evidence] predominantly a law of witnesses, mainly concerned with their qualification to testify."[45] In other words, an impressive discretionary methodology was in place to assure the court that testimony was not given by individuals who were situated at the periphery of legality (*extra legem*). The ability of a person to appear in court as witness was assessed in

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[42] Christopher Allen, *The Law of Evidence in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20.
[43] Edmund Heward, *Lord Mansfield. A Biography of William Murray 1st Earl of Mansfield 1705-1793, Lord Chief Justice for 32 years* (Chichester and London: Barry Rose, 1979), 170.
[44] Cited in Allen, *The Law of Evidence,* 16.
[45] Colin Tapper, *Cross and Taper on Evidence,* 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 243.

accordance to his/her social status. Usually, individuals who were too close to the parties involved (spouses, children, parents, servants) were deemed improper for the job. So did individuals of dubious reputation, formerly convicted, pilloried, whipped, burned in the hand for felony, or in any other forms exposed to the contempt of the public, in other words, all those whom juridical literature considered "infamous witnesses."

> If a Witness is infamous, he shall not be sworn; for Example, if he be attainted of a false Verdict, or of a Conspiracy at the Suit of the King, or convicted of Perjury, or of a *Preaemunire,* […] or convict of Felony, or by Judgment lost his Ears, or stood upon the Pillory or Tumbrel, or been *stigmaticus*, or the like, whereby he becomes infamous […] Or if the Witness be an Infidel, or *non sanae Memoriae*, or not of Discretion, or a Party interested, or the like.[46]

The list is a summary, yet it impresses by the sheer number of variables, and by the purging effects of these exclusions. It needs to be understood that the great majority of the individuals appearing in courts throughout the period were invested with authority resulting from their social and political rectitude, a status confirmed by the same laws under which they were being allowed to testify. It is precisely this compliance with the legal framework that characterizes such individuals as perpetuators of the juridical discourse, within which their contribution as witnesses was only a confirmation of their being good legal subjects. Equidistance and judicial clarity, were, therefore, the main criteria used in the acceptance of a testimony, having to do both with the actual facts under scrutiny and with the individuals who were engaged in the process. The role of these criteria (some of which are still in use) was to sort out the categories convenient to the law and to silence the voice of those who were outsiders to the legal establishment. The process of judicial validation of truth was, for this reason, very similar to that of scientific assent based on testimonies given by witnesses to an experiment. Barbara Shapiro shows that the latter borrowed the mechanism of justification from precisely this kind of juridical practices in which witnesses were being verified, rejected or accepted, assessed, and confirmed as generators of assent.[47] The conclusion is that anybody in their right minds, with a clean criminal record and at a safe distance from the parties involved, could be an acceptable witness. Sometimes, exceptions were made, especially when the performance of a juridical act risked being blocked because of lack of evidence. Such is

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[46] William Nelson, The Law of Evidence (London: 1717), 20.
[47] Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England. A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

the case with regards to parties materially incentivized to depose against the defendant. Informers, for instance, were encouraged to perform their duty towards the Crown by promises of a share from the bounty received from apprehending a robber. One could imagine that the material benefit derived from the action might have disqualified an informer from acting as a witness, since his deposition was biased. Nelson, however, indicates that this was not necessarily the case. "'Tis not a material Objection to say that the Informer shall not be a Witness, because he hath a Moiety of the Forfeiture; for in Cases of the like Nature, the Informer is always a good Witness." And with regards to the same type of crime, the same person was allowed to bear witness against the perpetrator of a robbery, even if that witness was the victim: "In the Statute of Robberies a Man swears for himself; because there can be no other Witness, and therefore he is a good Witness."[48] Also, legatees affected by a forged will could be sworn as witnesses in spite of their obvious implication in the case.These are only a handful of the multitude of possibilities left open by means of exceptions to sidestep the literal application of statutory legislation. They strengthen the fact of discretionary power based on which those invested with authority were able to operate. And to take this observation even further, it should be mentioned that the above exceptions did not apply in identical ways to individuals who had, at some point in life, come up against legal proscriptions (those who have upset a law intent on retaliation). Here, few exceptions seem to have been allowed, as juridical practices were insisting on the confirmation of individuals as *probi et legales hominess.*[49] Without this label, one could not serve upon a jury, nor appear as a witness in court. The obvious intention of the law to praise obedience and to oppose everything that was contrary to its scope (a biased approach, if we look at it from the perspective of the requirement of unprejudiced judgment on which legal discourse is said to be founded) is apparent in the fact that accomplices in an unlawful act were allowed to depose as witnesses as long as their depositions exposed the other perpetrator/s. "It was resolved by all the Judges," Nelson declares in relation to the prescriptions of a number of statutes promulgated under Edward VI and Mary I but still in use in the eighteenth century, "That those Prisoners who were equally culpable with the rest, may be made use of as Witnesses against their Fellows, and they are lawful Accusers, or lawful Witnesses."[50] What is immediately notable here is the unanimity of assent ("all the Judges") over an issue that is convenient to the legal discourse. Also, insofar as the

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[48] Nelson, *Law of Evidence*, 42.
[49] "One outlawed shall not be called *probus & legalis Homo.*" (Nelson, *Law of Evidence,* 30).
[50] Nelson, *Law of Evidence,* 30-31.

condition of the would-be witness is concerned, it must be noted that the law employed the passive voice to highlight the fact that the individual under legal examination is permanently at the discretion of the law. Witnesses who were allowed to testify against their confederates were merely "made use of," for as long as the interest of the law made them advantageous to the pursuit of legality. Once the betraying testimony had been registered, the individual was again extracted from the propositions of legality: "But the Lord Chief Baron *Hale* said, That if one of these culpable Persons be promised his Pardon, on Condition to give Evidence against the rest, that disables him to be a Witness against others, because he is bribed by saving his Life to be a Witness."[51]

The status of a witness in court was, therefore, highly predetermined. A witness would be compelled to appear in court, and to answer without hesitation the questions asked from them. In general, a witness was obliged to testify, although he could enjoy the privilege of remaining silent with regards to certain questions. Such was the case of the privilege against self-incrimination, whereby defendants testifying to their own benefit could not be forced to make statements that might result in their condemnation. John H. Langbein sees the emergence of the privilege against self-incrimination as a result of the "rise of adversary criminal procedure," and therefore locates it at the end of the eighteenth century. Others, however, have identified traces of it in the last decade of the seventeenth century, "as part of the aftermath of the constitutional struggles that resulted in the abolition of the Courts of Star Chamber and High Commission."[52] For Langbein, the privilege is also intimately tied with the emergence of the defense counsel. Prior to the eighteenth century, the defendant was placed face-to-face with the prosecutor, without any right to seek legal support.[53] The situation would have put him in a very *un*privileged position, knowing that the law was presented in erratic and arcane ways, making it difficult to understand, let alone practice on one's own, without training. "At no time were the technicalities of procedure more calculated to defeat the ends of justice," argues W. J. V. Windeyer:

> The courts insisted on the strictest verbal precision in pleadings, which, until 1730, had to be largely in Latin. This meant that the fate of an action often

[51] Ibid*.,* 31.
[52] John H. Langbein, "The Privilege and Common Law Criminal Procedure: The Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," *The Privilege Against Self-Incrimination. Its Origins and Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997): 82.
[53] Douglas Hay, "Prosecution and Power: Malicious Prosecution in the English Courts, 1750-1850," in *Policing and Presecution in Britain 1750-1850,* ed. Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): 367.

> depended, not on the application of legal principles, or on the justice of the case, but on such amazing trivialities as the description of a party as an 'esquire' when he ought to have been called a 'gentleman,' or on the court's view of the accuracy of the pleader's Latinity.[54]

Mitigations of these exaggerated requirements and a gradual acceptance of defense counsel were slowly informed juridical practices. Changes were first observable in cases of treason, where, in the last decade of the seventeenth century, after the promulgation of the 1696 Treason Trial Act, the accused were allowed on a regular basis to receive legal aid. However, it took the legal system almost a century and a half to transfer the benefit to felonies as well (through the Prisoner's Counsel Act of 1836), so that anybody implicated in a case against juridical power could at least have the chance to be represented. And thus, "the criminal trial came to be seen as an opportunity for the defendant's lawyer to test the prosecution case."[55] It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that, finally, "defense counsels effectively put the prosecutor on trial."[56]

If we accept Langbein's argument, then criminal procedures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were by and large the result of personal interpretations of statutes and historical precedents. This is to be found in the obliquely expressed concern of Swift when, in his well calculated ironic reversal, he describes justice in the kingdom of Brodbingnag: "As to the Decisions of civil Causes, or Proceedings against Criminals, their Precedents are so few, that they have little Reason to boast of any extraordinary Skill in either."[57] Without this lack of complication that would characterize an easily accessible legal system, the application of law, where "the success of the courts relied more upon men than upon mechanisms," was, it the period, the embodiment of a fiction.[58] Witnesses participated in this manifest fiction of justice by professing to act freely, while in fact allowing themselves the freedom to be made subjects.

No witness could depose of their own accord. Or if they could (in principle), their willingness to bear witness was not automatically considered by a court. Bearing witness meant having passed a pre-trial examination, and having aligned one's future deposition with the myriads of prerequisites that made it possible.

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[54] W. J. V. Windeyer, *Lectures on Legal History*, 227-28.
[55] Ibid., 83.
[56] Allyson N. May, *The Bar and the Old Bailey, 1750-1850* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 108.
[57] Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 126.
[58] Herrup, 62.

Importantly, prosecution at criminal courts was largely privatized. Until as late as 1879, when a shift was made towards a system based on public prosecution and a consolidation of police forces, whose role started to include prosecution-like duties, it was usually the business of the victim to commence prosecution, gather evidence, and even pay for the transport of witnesses from their respective homes to the assigned court. Ironically enough for the victim, all this was done at the risk of not having the perpetrator convicted, or even worse, having them hanged or transported to the New World colonies, which would have equally resulted in the impossibility of making up for the loss (unless, of course, the property of the convicted individual was confiscated prior to executing the sentence). As noted by David Friedman, English criminal prosecution of the period resembled, from this perspective, the contemporary American system of civil prosecution, in their common assumption that the initiation of the juridical process is a duty of the plaintiff. The comparison, however, should not deter one from noticing a major difference between the two systems: "The damage payment in civil law provides the victim with an incentive to sue. There seems to have been no corresponding incentive under the eighteenth-century system of private criminal prosecution."[59] On the contrary, Friedman states, magistrates were generally inclined to advise, in cases of crimes of lesser severity at least, "private settlement between the offender and the injured party, thus keeping disputes out of the courts."[60] As a consequence of this lack of reassurance with regards to the outcome of the trial, a major problem constantly pointed out by eighteenth-century authors of legal texts was "the difficulty of inducing people to prosecute."[61] It is therefore to be understood that when the criminal case was actually initiated, the injured party was minded to look after all the components of the trial, which included, of course, witnesses.

In order to make prosecution possible, a system of rewards was introduced. "Statute law provided for rewards of £40 to be paid to those apprehending highway robbers or burglars. 'Tyburn tickets' or certificates granting exemption from parochial office were

[59] David D. Friedman, "Making Sense of English Law Enforcement in the Eighteenth Century," *Roundtable* 2 (1995): 476.
[60] Ibid., 486.
[61] Ibid., 477.

also granted to those who apprehended burglars. Such certificates had a monetary value, since they could be sold."[62] These payments, which, in theory at least, any Englishman could enjoy in exchange for appropriate services, enabled a peculiar class of legal speculators to flourish, known under the name of "thief-takers." Men of this kind, reputed for their exceptional ability to return stolen goods, almost always under the protection of a no-questions-asked policy, were frequently employed by the victims, who were prepared to pay a considerable percentage off the estimated value of the stolen goods. Apart from their close connections with urban criminality, such thief-takers, who often performed the office of prosecution on behalf of the victim, also seem to have relied on the help of eye-witnesses or, when no such individuals could be found, on fabricated testimonies paid for out of the promised ransom.[63] The practice was common enough to attract jurors' suspicion and even more general public opprobrium. It was, however, only in the early nineteenth century, when the consolidation of the police forces required the elimination of unwanted competition of the kind represented by thief-takers, that the system of rewards was abrogated. In its stead, statutes concerned with criminal prosecution started stipulating payments made to the injured party at the discretion of the judge and intended as a reimbursement for the costs of the trial.[64]

The lateness of these developments, directed against the reward system, indicate that for the greatest part of the eighteenth century, witnesses in criminal cases were largely motivated to behave in ways which made them anything but disinterested. In fact, a significant concern expressed throughout the period was that the prosecutorial system in place "encouraged false witnesses, who found it all too easy to bring about the condemnation of innocent men."[65] Not only did witnesses testify against whoever was required or conveniently available, they often did so, as already mentioned, against people with whom they themselves had performed criminal acts. The practice of betraying confederates by bringing them to court to be prosecuted for acts performed in association was indeed widespread, prompted primarily by the very same reward procedure, or by the need to elude witnesses' own conviction. In the latter situation, the

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[62] Ruth Paley, "Thief-takers in London in the Age of the McDaniel Gang, c. 1745-1754," Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder, eds., *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750-1850,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): 316-17.
[63] Ibid., 316.
[64] J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England. 1660-1800,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986): 58.
[65] John H. Langbein, "Shaping the Eighteenth-Century Criminal Trial: A View from the Ryder Sources," *The University of Chicago Law Review* (vol. 50, no. 1, Winter 1983): 2.

testifiers were known as "crown witnesses," a status which allowed them to escape prosecution and enjoy relative freedom until the next (inevitable) brush with the law, when such privileges were not granted again.[66]

Whether taken care of by victims forced to show generosity in exchange for positive depositions, or enticed by thief-takers to appear in court for promised ransoms, witnessing individuals were often an interested party in the trial, which was precisely what juridical texts were indicating as unacceptable by the rules of fair examination of evidence. Even more importantly, such practices turned testifiers into active perpetuators of the legal discourse by involving them directly in the materialization of juridical functions. The material incentives offered to those willing to appear in court explains self-evident indiscretion, excessive curiosity, and transgression of neighbourly space, or intrusiveness.

In order to endow their own statements with validity, in a context in which no clear ground for the quantification of the legal act was available, magistrates in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had to borrow massively from the discourse of evidence promoted in philosophical, religious, or scientific texts, the only sources which articulate evidence in theoretical terms.[67] It is from this perspective that we need to read Locke's grounds of evidentiary qualifications as foundational to the ways in which witnesses testifying in criminal courts were regarded. In Book IV, Chapter 16 of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* Locke distinguishes certainty from probability. The former, which is contained in the thing itself, requires no proof. Probability, however, is where the mind becomes murky by accepting as truths the utterances of others. There are, to Locke, superior forms of probability and inferior forms of probability. Where the 'thing itself' is not present, it is sufficient to know whether the truth under consideration is founded on easily verifiable proofs (such as natural phenomena observable and knowable by all humans in equal measure). In such cases, the testimony of others is not doubted because it confirms one's own experience and memory. Assent is easy to attain in such cases, because doubts are minimal. Assent becomes problematic when the evidence from personal experience clashes with that of others or when there are flagrant discrepancies between various testimonies. Locke says that "any testimony, the farther off it is from the

[66] Ibid., 86.

[67] See Barbara Shapiro, *Beyond "Reasonable Doubt" and "Probable Cause". Historical Perspectives on the Anglo-American Law of Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

original truth, the less force and proof it has."[68] In Locke's terms, testimony is dealt with in terms of stratification (there may be layers of evidence, piled one upon another, as individual persons might corroborate what they know and what they have found out from others' trustworthy testimony), and from this perspective evidence acquired from hearsay, for instance, is deemed unacceptable.

> The being and existence of the thing itself is what I call the original truth. A credible man vouching his knowledge of it is a good proof: but if another equally credible do witness it from his report, the testimony is weaker; and a third that attests the hearsay of an hearsay, is yet less considerable. So that, in traditional truths, each remove weakens the force of the proof: and the more hands the tradition has successively passed through, the less strength and evidence does it receive from them.[69]

The argument here rests on the necessity of direct witnessing, or direct personal experience, and therefore testimony occupies central position. Acquiring the right amount of probability is, therefore, a matter of diagnosing a person's position in relation to the facts that require assent. This was the case, until the sixteenth century, with jurymen in criminal courts, who were recruited from local people who themselves would have had a lot of knowledge about the parties involved.[70] These self-informing juries, which often took over the prerogatives of the judges appointed for the case, were invested with tremendous authority, and performed in ways that transgressed juridical requirements. As John H. Langbein points out, such jurymen "came to court more to speak than to listen," and their evidence equated that of witnesses, a problem solved in the second half of the sixteenth century with the rise of a new juridical character: the justice of the peace.[71]

Locke's theory of degrees of assent is, as Barbara Shapiro indicates, an illustration of the interconnection between natural sciences and jurisprudence in seventeenth century, when an equal emphasis on probability was championed by both discourses (perhaps, as Shapiro suggests, because of their equal indebtedness to the precedence of Bacon, who had been a lawyer by profession and a scientist by training): "In science, statements about

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[68] John Locke, *The Works of John Locke* (Glasgow: Thomas Tegg and Dublin: J. Cumming, 1823), Vol. III, 108.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England. A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 175-76.
[71] John H. Langbein, "The Origins of Public Prosecution at Common Law," *American Journal of Legal History* 17 (1973): 314.

the real world became probabilistic hypotheses. In law, an examination of the credibility of witnesses and a concern for truth beyond a reasonable doubt became the standard."[72]

But Locke's approach to probability raised another important problem: the credibility of testimonies. When no knowledge of the 'thing itself' is possible, and no evidence of one's senses can be adduced to support a positive appreciation of the truth, the entire weight of a proof rests upon witnesses. That, in itself, is a problem likely to cause troubles, since no certainty can be acquired that the experience of others can be known in full. I will later (in part three) discuss Locke's theory of the impossibility of knowing the minds of others, which follows upon his treatment of the grounds of certainty. Here it is sufficient to mention that, in Chapter 15 of the same book of the *Essay* (IV)*,* Locke outlines very briefly a mugshot description of the ideal witness, whose credibility, he argued, must be assessed against six major criteria: "In the testimony of others is to be considered, 1. The number. 2. The integrity. 3. The skill of the witnesses. 4. The design of the author, where it is a testimony out of a book cited. 5. The consistency of the parts and circumstances of the relation. 6. Contrary testimonies."[73] In this account, the stress is placed first on the social relevance of the person who testifies and who needs to be tested in order to identify possible weaknesses in his/her deposition, which would automatically disqualify him/her. It is significant that these weaknesses do not arise from the witnesses' position relative to an event (or truth), but from the force of their persuasion, which is based on criteria exterior to the event itself. And so, it turns out that "evidence is a matter of degrees," or "a matter not of absolutes, but of more-or-less."[74]

Locke's popularity meant that his treatment of the topic of reliable witnesses was largely employed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and consequently informed the development of the law of evidence, which purported to regulate individual citizens' access to courts as witnesses. The close reading and application of these principles also caused a gradual complication of relevant procedural matters, which ended up as the target of nineteenth-century criticism, when Jeremy Bentham, for instance, proposed a system of 'free proof,' based on logical, rather than social assessments of evidence.[75]

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[72] Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 168.
[73] Locke, *Works III,* 98.
[74] Nicholas Rescher and Carrey B. Joynt, "Evidence in History and in the Law," *The Journal of Philosophy* 56, no. 13 (Jun. 18, 1959): 563.
[75] Frederick Schauer, "On the Supposed Jury-Dependence of Evidence Law," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 155, no. 1 (Nov. 2006): 169.

Like Locke, juridical writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were constantly involved in debates about the nature of evidence, the acceptability of witnesses and the nature of the relationship between the different actors involved in a trial. Reality, however, seems to have been significantly different from these theoretical efforts. Putting aside the intellectual weight of the laws of evidence, one found oneself in a situation where what mattered was not so much the judge's or jury's ability to be disinterested in the case at hand and to apply scientifically-guaranteed methods of truth validation, so much as the dynamics of social order which defined the identity and mobility of the parties. When such criteria are considered, it is surprising to see the great number of cases in which the letter of the law was interpreted to one's own gain, and to the detriment of someone else (the law included). Douglas Hay makes a case in point out of a number of examples of eighteenth and nineteenth-century trials which made apparent the fact that "the criminal courts could be improperly made an instrument of personal power."[76] As Hay's article suggests, turning the law to one's advantage was reflected in malicious prosecution, a phenomenon which in the eighteenth century went largely unquestioned, albeit noticed every now and then. The prosecution of prosecutors in a period in which obtaining an indictment was a problem in itself, and when the law was often incapable of finding sufficient grounds to initiate its discursive authority, could not be easily realized:

> Malicious prosecutions on capital statutes, though in effect attempts at murder, could not be prosecuted as such even when the grossest perjury had been shown, for fear that prosecutors would be wholly deterred from proceeding. And a prosecution for perjury or conspiracy was both expensive and difficult, as it entailed the technicalities and costs associated with trials for serious misdemeanour, and perhaps also required (as a criminal proceeding) a higher standard of proof.[77]

As pointed out in the first part of the above statement, the reasons behind non-prosecution do not originate entirely in the financial difficulties a would-be plaintiff may have encountered. The reluctance to sue was also motivated by a programmatic tendency towards protecting the prosecutor if magistrates wanted to have a case on their hands. In fact, eighteenth-century authors of juridical compilations often illustrated this anxiety about the inception of legal proceedings, which were constantly under the threat of irrelevance. William Blackstone, in the second half of the eighteenth century, expressed

[76] Hay, "Prosecution and Power, 347.
[77] Ibid., 350.

significant concerns in relation to the risk in asserting that "it would be a very great discouragement to the public justice of the Kingdom if prosecutors, who had a tolerable ground of suspicion, were liable to be sued at law whenever their indictments miscarried."[78] Under the practices of private action, which differentiated the English legal system from its continental counterparts, great care was taken to safeguard the fragility of prosecution, on which the existence of a trial entirely depended. Blackstone makes it clear that his worries are warranted not by the assumption that the actual plaintiff may be harmed, but by the strikingly ideological concern that law itself may be put at bay, that, in other words, the actual legal action may not take place. "For it is not the danger of the plaintiff," he stresses, "but the scandal, vexation, and expense, upon which this action [against malicious prosecution] is founded."[79]

Anxious about weakening itself, juridical discourse was ready to accept many forms of doubtful, or even unacceptable (under its own regulation) legal situations, in the hope that the commencement of the judicial action would legitimate the use of law as a form of public power, and that the authority of law could not be undermined by procedural limitations; not even by the self-imposed ones. In this way, as in the case of the common law's reliance on precedents, the discourse of legality demonstrated that law could be self-transgressive without being accountable for the transgression.

I have already mentioned the breaching of the rule dealing with the quantity of witness evidence, a concern expressed by seventeenth-century authors, who saw in it the fragility of an overemphasized legal determinism. The fact that Blackstone, a century later, was still interested in condemning non-compliance with legal requirements shows that English legal discourse had not changed much in terms of fulfilling its own prerogatives. Law was still, at the end of the eighteenth century, a rebellious creature, which contravened the provisions of legality under which it supposedly operated. Since the image of law and its representatives was anything but safe from this kind of negative perception in the minds of eighteenth-century lay audiences, a strong movement towards reparation was apparent in the texts of juridical authors. In the case of testimonies, what seems to have been the intention behind requirements for witnesses' personal qualities was precisely an unpronounced intention to protect the honour of the judicial institution by dissociating it from any dubious elements which may have crossed its threshold. Hence, the excessive attention paid to the identity of witness and their moral probity,

[78] Blackstone, *Commentaries* vol. II, 101.
[79] Ibid.

which, since Locke's intervention, were permanently tested against personal narratives. "All witnesses," Blackstone states, echoing his predecessors, "of whatever religion or country, that have the use of their reason, are to be received and examined, except such as are *infamous*, or such as are *interested* in the event of the cause. All others are *competent* witnesses; though the jury from other circumstances will judge of their *credibility*."[80] A clear distinction is made here between the social condition of truth and its interpretation through the filter of legal warranting (a point strengthened by the fact that reference to "infidels," prominent in Nelson's early-eighteenth century tract, are dropped by Blackstone, to leave room for the full development of the social argument).

That truth circulates freely is one thing; that it needs to be filtered in order to match an accepted discourse is another. Justice is, once again, omnipotent: it can, at its will, check the reliability of an individual; it can decide as to who is allowed to become a witness; and it can position itself, like a superstructure, above the mass of individuals. This explains why, "once he does appear before the law, the witness is not called upon simply to 'tell his story' in the lyric mode of autobiography. Rather, his testimony consists of his responses to specific questions put to him by a functionary of the court."[81] Based on this observation, Andrea Frisch challenges Derrida's assumption, mentioned earlier, that testimonies are first-person accounts. Instead, she proposes that we regard witnesses as second-person addressees, since there is more in the workings of the law that speaks to the witness than it is matter of the witness speaking to the law.

What Blackstone intended in formulating his definition was the reiteration of a protective policy at least two centuries old, which had been assuring courts of their own credibility while encouraging the public to gain confidence in its voice as that of a centralized and centralizing institution. Of course, a court could not be credible if it accepted evidence from a person it had previously convicted: it falls within the logic of causality. And such a minimal logical precept governed applications of the law of evidence, even when a former offender was the only possible eyewitness.

The intention becomes more obvious when Blackstone defines infamous witnesses: "*Infamous* persons are such as may be challenged as jurors, *propter delictum*; and therefore never shall be admitted to give evidence to inform that jury, with whom they were too scandalous to associate."[82] The honourableness of the person testifying in court was, therefore, paramount to the acceptance of their depositions. By shifting the perspective,

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[80] Blackstone, *Commentaries III*, 285-86.
[81] Frisch, *The Invention of the Eyewitness*, 31-32.
[82] Blackstone, *Commentaries III,* 286.

one could very well read this as an invitation to preserve hypocrisy or social decorum in order to match the discourse of licitness, in which hypocrisy, as a non-personal, outwardly oriented set of gestures, is central to the good functioning of the system. *Cant*, in all its institutionalized forms, is said by Jenny Davidson to be an unavoidable and necessary engine of social consensus: "Indeed, if everyone suddenly stopped lubricating social interactions with politeness, the consequences for the institutions of daily life – families, schools, religious organizations, companies, governments – would likely be catastrophic."[83] With such a persuasive backing, it comes as no surprise that juridical practices would require witnesses to be persons of quality, their reputation having to match the reputation of the legal framework in which they are compelled to perform.

[83] Jenny Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness. Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

Chapter 5. The rise of the overlooked witness

Benefits of law

Witnessing, however, was not always a discouraging imposition. There were also many benefits to be had from having access to the juridical system, and justice was rather generous in this respect. Around the turn of the eighteenth century, the concerns raised by the access to court of questionable characters resounded in a passionate sermon delivered before the commencement of the Summer Assizes in Kent. Dealing precisely with the topic of witnesses' duties, in the good tradition of religious admonitions, this sermon was part of a sonorous war against all those who "abuse the *Civil* Sword [...] by drawing it as a Weapon to revenge private Quarrels."[84] By these abusers, the author meant malicious prosecutors. So far, we read the ingenuous concerns of a morally sound subject who dreams of stopping illegalities from sneaking into courts and taking the shine off justice. But no sooner was the issue touched upon, than the sermon turns quite abruptly to a topic which strikes an already familiar chord:

> If then we would be free from this Temptation [to falsely accuse somebody], let us preserve perfect Charity; let us learn to forgive those who have provok'd us, and lay aside all manner of Resentment; let us consider that our business here is to do Right, not to repay Wrong; and let us remember, that to accuse falsly, or to detract from the merits of any man in Judgement, is the very distinguishing Character of the Devil himself; and does, above any other Sin, make us the Children of that *Father of Lyes*, whose constant work it is to slander the Brethren before the Throne of GOD.[85]

This passage talks about the need to remain calm in the face of defamation and to preserve the state of non-intervention in the business of justice. In itself, it seems to

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[84] George Stanhope, *The Duty of Witnesses. A Seromon, Preach'd at the Summer Assizes Holden at Maidstone in Kent, Before the Right Honourable The Lord Chief-Justice Holt, and Mr. Justice Gould, August the 5th, 1701* (London: printed by F. Collins, 1701), 13.
[85] Ibid.

address the issue of retaliation in terms of the Christian topos of the 'other cheek.' However, at a deeper level, the paragraph attempts to cool the irritated spirits of those who may have been victims of a wrongdoing backed by juridical procedures, which had turned a blind eye to malicious prosecution and allowed liars to depose only for the sake of commencing and supporting prosecution. In fact, the legal discourse was rather busy sending encouragements to anonymous citizens to take the discourse in their own hands and apply it freely, without (in theory at least) the sanction of prosecution.

An interesting class of self-styled men of law, pointed out by Douglas Hay, is that of *horse-takers*: a name clearly fashioned on that of thief-takers. According to the provisions of the so-called "turnpike acts" of the eighteenth century, control over the number of horse-drawn vehicles on public roads was to be assured by intercepting those who were avoiding the payment of tolls.[86] As this was not an easy task for officials to fulfill, legislative measures were instated to reanimate a centuries-old judicial measure, known as *qui tam* prosecution. It said that whoever helped in prosecuting an illegal act was entitled to a part or even the totality of the penalty computed by the magistrate. In relation to the turnpike roads of the eighteenth century, this provision translated simply into the possibility for the informant to appropriate the horses and carts of those who had breached the law. Such measures were open invitations to ordinary people to become informants. Eye-witnesses were given the possibility of putting their observations to lucrative use. In other words, the witnessing act was commodified, in that it was given an economic value – an unstable one, to be sure, but a great incentive nonetheless.[87]

The encouragement that low-class individuals were being given through such stipulations generated public reactions which needed to be kept out of courts. Legally speaking, the victims of ill-intended informants would always have the opportunity to sue,in return, false witnesses and to reclaim their confiscated property. Hay states that this happened in a considerable number of situations, since the victims of such malicious appropriations of personal goods were much wealthier than their prosecutors, who not only came from the lowest strata of the society, but also enjoyed a bad reputation among the wider community. Nevertheless, one must retain the fact that "in most cases the

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[86] In relation to the turnpike acts of the eighteenth century and their economic significance, see Dan Bogart, "The Role of Political Institutions in Economic Growth: Evidence from Turnpike Acts in Eighteenth-Century England," *American Law and Economics Association Annual Meetings* (Berkeley: Berkeley Electronic Press, 2007), URL: http://law.bepress.com/alea/17th/art7.
[87] Hay, "Prosecution and Power," 356.

prosecution was absolutely justified in law,"[88] and not only justified, but also necessary, since without prosecution, well- or ill-intended, there could be no trial. Indeed, by allowing private persons to materialize a legal provision by turning it into a form of civil or penal punishment, the discourse of law was investing the individual with the authority to act as its representative. Thus, the impression was created that the law was not idle but, on the contrary, was enacted in various and unexpected forms. Omnipotence is a resultant of omnipresence, and this principle was given substance in *qui tam* prosecutions, in which a small gain for the individual meant an enormous gain for the functionality of the legal superstructure. It is therefore not surprising that a sermon such as that read by George Stanhope, Anglican dean of Canterbury and royal chaplain under two monarchies, should have advised Christian charity in the face of ill-intended prosecution. The purpose was to protect the functioning of all extensions of the law (such as the horse-takers or any other legally sanctioned incentive to deal with legal matters) and also to give the law reasons to function in its own interest. "To do Right, not to repay Wrong," suggests that the furthering of legal interest was more important than the concern of the isolated individual. Yet far from discouraging private persons from acting on their own behalf, this juridical norm created a breach in the legal façade, which allowed the infiltration of numerous profiteers or individuals who were simply seeking personal justice where justice itself seemed to have failed them.

It can be presumed that in this period, in which the texture of the law was becoming visible through readily available pamphlets, tracts, or novels, individuals were learning how to manipulate the law. The landscape of legal institutions was more than generous in this respect. In London, for instance, as Hay has shown, "the great number of courts, many of them in almost constant session, made legal proceedings a natural way in which to conduct disputes, and to manoeuvre for advantage."[89] And the result was as expected: a professionalized class of private law-users, witnesses who were testifying in full awareness of the weight and significance of their testimonies, individuals who were fully accustomed with ways in which the possibilities opened to them by the letter of the law could be used to their own advantage. "Certainly there were men and women there who knew how to work the system not only in petty quarrels, but to protect themselves from

[88] Ibid., 357.
[89] Ibid., 362.

serious charges, by putting a would-be prosecutor in goal on a false charge, or even by accomplishing his death."[90]

It is certain, however, that the adaptability of the law to personal use offered the perfect avenue for the leveling of both class and gender inequality. Prosecution as a legal weapon was employed by large numbers of servants, for instance, who sought to bring their masters to the common law not only because illegal acts had been committed against them, but also because the chasm between their respective classes needed to be brought as close as possible to a common denominator. This aspect raised awareness and immediate response from prominent figures, such as Swift and Defoe, who drew the conclusion that eighteenth-century servants were threatening the established order in multiple ways. They dressed up to the standards of the higher ranks, helped themselves to the masters' status and wealth, and dreamed of becoming the equals of those who were their superiors. In other words, servants confused basic principles of distinction; and this was also visible in the courts. Since, as most legal historians agree, eighteenth-century law was largely available only to those who could afford it, servants' access to prosecution was a significant form of upward mobility, and very similar to their cross-class dressing, or to their insistence on better remuneration.

It is important to stress the nature of the relationship between masters and servants in the eighteenth century. The impression generated by many popular texts of the period, in which the emphasis was almost always placed upon the moral indebtedness of the servant to the head of the household, was that the relationship between the two types was one organized in accordance with the model of the family structure. The discussion in these texts was conducted on strong patriarchal grounds, where the master was placed at the top of domestic hierarchies, while the servants occupied the bottom positions. In reality, however, the two were bound to interact with each other on contractual terms, which implied rights and responsibilities on both sides. So much so that the discrepancy between the master and the servant was reduced to a distinction by wealth and social status, and not one founded on subjection, as in the case of slaves. As a consequence, "the motive on both sides in almost every instance [was] the purest self-interest."[91]

Masters, however, had the upper hand. The customary way in which contractual stipulations with regards to servants' remunerations were carried out allowed for considerable delays in the payment of wages, as well as other kinds of abuses, such as the

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[90] Ibid.

[91] J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1956), p. 71.

overestimation of the payment in kind, represented by accommodation, food, clothes and other such goods offered to the servant free of charge: "These customs afforded not only grounds for dispute about what was customary – a large part of the argument about perks and embezzlement – but also splendid pretexts for malicious prosecutions for theft."[92] In other words, faithful to the equality presupposed by the contractual provisions on which the relationship was based, both servants and masters would equally have had reasons to sue, if anything in the behaviour of the other were to upset them. Hay suggests that almost all charges pressed by servants were related to some form of violation of the contract by the master.

> In almost all cases the employer sought to avoid fulfilling an unwritten agreement, usually to pay wages, either in money or in kind. His means was an accusation of theft against the servant. Sometimes the alleged theft was goods which were part of the payment, sometimes it was other household items or industrial materials which the servant, much earlier in the relationship, was allowed to have. Very frequently, because money wages were so often in arrears to servants – years, even decades – a prosecution for theft, or the threat of it, would be used to get rid of a servant who was becoming too importunate. [...] On other occasions, theft charges were used to avoid paying wages when servants decided to leave service against the master's wishes.[93]

The intention to call their master to court was, therefore, motivated by the servant's intention to repair an injustice done to them against the provisions of the contract which had framed their relationship. The situation in court, before any sentence has been uttered, is an expression of an imbalance: the servant, as the dispossessed, is the one wronged; he/she wants the situation to be resolved in their favour. In this desire to usurp the pre-trial status quo we find the origin of the servant's urge to peep into their masters' privacy. The privacy of the master, as a domain forbidden to the servant, could only be accessed with this transgression in mind: by turning the invisible into visible, he/she also made it possible for the social order to be reversed. Negotiations around payment of wages are also significant here, because they took place with the same distinction in mind between the visible and the invisible. On the face of the facts, the only thing that was known with certainty, and the only thing that was freely visible to anyone in the public domain, was the provision of the contract. What remained invisible and, therefore, had to be proven (had to be rendered visible) was the infringement.

[92] Hay, "Prosecution and Power," 373.
[93] Ibid.

To the freedom of the master to violate a visible entity such as the indenture, the servant also responded with an infringement upon something that was visible yet hidden: the privacy of the master, which is just another type of contract.

Too close for comfort. The servant at the keyhole

Unsurprisingly, public discussions involving servants in eighteenth-century England were mostly concerned with the dangers of role reversals. Operating on the dividing line between the public and the private, with their interests sliding very easily from one side to the other, domestic servants raised important questions as to the accessibility allowed them through the interior of the household.

There seems to have been significant agreement as to the customary problems raised by servants' proximity to their masters or employers, considered to be dangerously close. In most cases, access to the secret lives of their masters suggests the underlying potentiality of disclosure, closely related to the keyhole phenomenon. Faced with an unprecedented invasion of servants, Londoners in particular complained constantly about the difficulties in finding suitable 'domesticks.' But what was this suitability supposed to represent?

Issues to do with insubordination were paramount in the complaints formulated by writers of many kinds. The fact that "the servants aped the master" was an element that traverses most of the practical manuals and critical or satirical takes on the same issue.[94] Reading eighteenth-century texts, Donald Marshall noticed that imitation of the master started not only from a personal will to advance but also from negligence of masters in relation to observing class stratifications in a society obsessed with appearance, distinction and the proper delimitation of individual prerogatives.

The "aping" of the master took a multitude of forms. Obviously, clothes were an important element in this process of confusion, since they were closely related to

[94] D. Marshall, "The Domestic Servants of the Eighteenth Century," *Economic* 25 (Apr. 1929): 21.

appearances. Defoe, for instance, grew especially angry on an occasion when, visiting a friend's house, he mistook one of the maid servants for the lady of the house and kissed her with utmost reverence, which caused those present to burst into a "general Titter."[95] Confusion caused by such reversals of the accepted dress codes made him inveigh against the widely spread custom among domestics of borrowing their mistresses' dresses or helping themselves to castoff apparel. "I am," Defoe wrote, "entirely against any Servants wearing of Silks, Laces, and other superfluous Finery." Obviously, the reason was that "it sets them above themselves, and makes their Mistresses contemptible in their eyes."[96] Defoe was not alone in this veritable crusade against servants' tendency towards replacing, at least symbolically and in appearance, their mistresses. Even more gentle tracts, such as *The Servants Calling* published the same year as Defoe's rant, acknowledged the risks that came with reversal. Seeing pride as a major problem in the regulation of social strata, the tract identified an important redress in the reinstallation of "Modesty in Dress." "For one great Cause as well as Effect of Pride in Servants," the author said,

> is a Fondness of being fine, or a Desire of appearing in a Habit above their Degree; a Folly very frequent in female Servants, who think to recommend themselves by such an Outside: the immediate Effect of which is, that their Heads are turned with Self-Admiration, and fill'd with Notions of their Advancement. For being clothed above their Equals, they think themselves equal to their Superiors, and begin to act accordingly.[97]

Self-admiration was a serious danger to the dynamics of social representation. Taken away from the admiration of the superior, the servant turned toward himself, thus rendering the status of the master ineffectual and pushing the boundaries of social stratification towards dissolution. He no longer constructed himself as a subject, but as an independent actor in the social order, who behaved according to his own rules and in pursuit of personal interest. The problems raised by such inversion of the order of interests found a close connection to the keyhole function. Since the role of the servant was no longer that of a pursuer of his master's interests, he was only one step from turning against the latter's privacy and utilizing it to his own benefit. Of course, the risk was promptly addressed by most authors. *Laws Concerning Masters and Servants*, a

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[95] Daniel Defoe, *Every-Body's Business, Is No-Body's Business* (London: printed for W. Meadows, 1725), 226.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Zinzano, *The Servants Calling; With Some Advice to the Apprentice: Designed for Such as Have Had the Benefit of a Good Education, Or would be Assisted Under the Disadvantage of a Bad One* (London: printed for G. Strahan, 1725), 21.

compilation of legal prescriptions published in 1767, proves that the problem was very much active and troublesome in the second half of the century as well. Discussing the issue of servants' exorbitant wages (which seems to have been the actual cause of Defoe's angry outbursts), the author of the tract related his legal analysis to commonly shared assumptions about servants.

> It would contribute much to the Amendment of Servants who are grown so high minded now, that they don't know what Wages to ask, if they were settled. Many Tradesmen's Wives in *London* give their Maids eight Pounds a Year, and enable them, with their Vails, to go in as good Silks and as fine Linnen, as their Mistresses; which is neither proper nor suitable for Servants, whose Wearing and Living ought to be at a much greater Distance; this makes them saucy and negligent; People were much better served formerly, when a Maid in a good Family had but forty Shillings a Year, and wore as Stuff Gown and a plain round eared Cap, a Gown which with the Neatness then in Use would last half a dozen Years, and often much longer; they were then kept in a state of Humility as Servants ought to be; and they saved more than out of 40s. a Year Wages, than they do now out of eight Pounds.[98]

The discourse has not changed in almost half a century; the servant is still looked upon as a potential "domestic enemy," to use the title of Cissie Fairchilds' book on the topic.[99] Apart from not mentioning any legal text addressing the issue of social cross-dressing (which may have transgressed social customs but did not violate any written laws), the fragment above does nothing but perpetuate the customary treatment of the servant problem, which was almost always focused on pecuniary aspects and on the propriety of social intercourse and the management of social appearance.

Defoe's critical approach was not his only eruption. It had a precedent in his 1715 *The Family Instructor*, in which he had dedicated an entire section to the relationship between masters and servants. This earlier work, however, did not develop the angry tone of what would become *The Behaviour of Servants in England Inquired Into* (1724) and *Everybody's Business is Nobody's Business* (1725). The chapter in *The Family Instructor* was concerned with religious aspects in general, and in particular with the need for servants to be allowed proper moral and religious education. The problem of role reversal is already apparent in the 1715 tract, where Defoe imagines a series of five dialogues between two neighbouring tradesmen and their respective servants on matters related to access to religion. The text identifies a moment of crisis when one of the masters, who has been postponing

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[98] *Laws Concerning Masters and Servants* (London: printed for W. Owen, 1767), 26-27.
[99] Cissie C. Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants & Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

attendance of religious matters, hires a servant brought up by his father in a proper religious atmosphere. Not being allowed by his severe new master to attend prayers, the servant takes the matter into his own hands and starts visiting the other tradesman's shop, who, unlike his neighbour, is religiously driven in all his daily activities. The situation is concluded with a happy ending, in which everyone realizes the importance of religion in the conducting of business and in the upbringing of children and servants. However, it is significant that the narrative takes into consideration servants' independence from their masters, and also that it highlights the risks implied by such freedom. By resolving to make up for his master's irreverent attitude, the servant vacates an important place in the household, that of the obedient servant. Such movement created disruption and opened the way to several other instances of insubordination, which Defoe would duly address in later, more acerbic tracts. The servant in *The Family Instructor* is not only gaining a dangerous freedom, he also takes over responsibilities that belong to his master, to do with education and control; and this is where Defoe aims his critique. Although the master shares the common complaint about self-determination, which makes the servants "too high for Reproof and Correction," the actual problem lies not with the subaltern but with the superior, who fails to perform to his expected standard: "for 'tis but murthering Youth, and robbing their Fathers, to take Young Men, and then keep them under no Government."[100]

What Defoe did not realize was that servants were troublesome individuals not because they aimed too high, but because their existence was based on a kind of mobility that did not always allow the system full control over their social movements. Nomads by definition, and capable of employing personal choice in finding their jobs, servants ended up upsetting the clarity of social relations and instating a form of 'government' that served exclusively personal and local interests. In Defoe's words: "The greatest Abuse of all is, that these Creatures are become their own Law-givers; nay, I think they are ours too, tho' No-body would imagine that such a Set of Slatterns should bamboozle a whole Nation: But it is neither better nor worse, they hire themselves to you by their own Rule."[101] Hence the recurrent attempt at modeling the relationship between masters and servants upon that of fathers and children, in the hope that patriarchy was capable of offering a better model. In other words, the efforts are primarily directed towards

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[100] Defoe, *The Family-Instructor*, *In Three Parts: I. Relating to Fathers and Children. II. To Masters and Servants. III. To Husbands and Wives* (Glasgow: printed for John Robertson, 1717), 220, 252.
[101] Defoe, *Everybody's Business*, 13.

imposing a model in which relations are controlled from above and where movements are not upwards and singular, but circular and repetitive, and only allowed within the confines of the established hierarchy.

Lack of control, in this logic, leads to lack of order. This confirms Michel Foucault's assumption that systems of power require not only the subjection of the individual but also constant surveillance and the embedding of the principles of power relations in the conscience of the subject. Without this control, the dominant discourse falls into an irreparable state of autonomy, where its essence circulates freely from one actor to another, without any consideration for the propriety of social or political norms. The relation between masters and servants, modeled on that between sovereigns and subjects, must answer a set of expectations which cannot be simply suspended by personal negligence. Among the various detrimental effects of such inverted situations, Defoe includes that of public disclosure of domestic secrets. Turned away from their position as obedient and silent individuals serving exclusively their master's will, servants become, in his vision, vociferous rebels who escape control altogether. If the mistress perceives instances of abnormal behaviour in her maid servant, Defoe advices, "hold your Tongue for Peace sake, or Madam will say, You grudge her Victuals, and expose you to the last Degree all over the Neighbourhood."[102]

Returning to the idea of "aping the master" formulated by Marshall, the servants' propensity to watch closely their masters' actions may very well have been retaliation for the superior's power of surveillance over the social behaviour of their subjects. This dominance was official, openly stated and discursively applied to all domestic actions, which allowed no doubt as to the structure of power relations. The terms of these relations were dogmatically formulated. In the case of servants' pride, for instance, the author of *The Servants Calling* advises merciless control: "[E]very approach to [pride] is to be watched, every Spark of it extinguish'd as soon as visible."[103]

Stuck in the discourses of dominance and subjection, where everything is measured in terms of property, and where the master has the last word because he is the owner of everything, the keyhole is, possibly, the servant's only property, which he uses to his heart's content. Criticism of the servant class was quick to spot the danger.

> The Business of Servants within Doors, and their Attendance upon the Persons whom they serve, give them many Opportunities of knowing their

[102] Ibid., 7-8.
[103] *The Servants Calling*, 17.

> Affairs, hearing their private Conversation, and seeing their Conduct at all Times: Of which they often make a bad Use; growing inquisitive and curious, in order to qualify themselves for Spies, and furnish Matter for Report.
> (*The Servants Calling,* 37)

Servants qualified very well as potential secret agents, since they had unmediated access to information that was hidden from public consumption. Thus, their conscious manipulation of information gained within the domestic field was meant to renegotiate their position in the class equation.

Critics turned especially eloquent with their examples when it came to the disclosure of domestic secrets. Here is the narration of the classical example of Domitius and the unfaithful servant, used as a warning for inquisitive servants:

> *Domitius* a *Roman* Tribune summon'd Prince *Scaurus* before the People's Tribunal; the servant of *Scaurus* hearing it, goes to *Domitius*, and informs him, that if he wanted Matter, he could furnish him with sufficient for his Lord's Condemnation; Which Treachery *Domitius* rewarded by cutting off his Ears, sealing up his Lips, and sending him to his Master. An Act of true *Roman* Generosity, setting an Example how Servants ought to be used, that abuse the Confidence placed in them to the Dishonour and Destruction of their Masters. [...] And if Servants that tell what they do know, ought thus to be distinguished, certainly those that invent what they do now know, to the same End, and that make the Falsehood by which they defame their Master, ought never to be excused: Their Lips especially should be sealed, or sewed up; and their Talents known for the Security of such as otherwise might trust them.[104]

The curious insistence upon harsh punishment draws attention to the subjection of the body as an external manifestation of inner insubordination. It also advises servants as to the potential dangers their actions may draw upon themselves: the classical cautionary discourse meant to discipline those with a propensity to err against established order.

Parallel to the discourse of law enforcement, there runs another equally strong and equally emphasized principle, which makes servants' escape from their masters' influence impossible. This is reflected in the question whether a servant should obey a master whose actions are illicit or unacceptable. Drawing upon the necessity to obey without questioning, the critics of servants' independence opt for a positive answer, and they bring a host of Christian examples in support of their assertion, among which the parable of Christ's sufferings upon the cross reigns supreme. It is customarily regarded as a sign of virtue to tolerate injustice done to oneself; therefore, the servant who aims at religious authorization of his identity must embrace happily even the most atrocious master,

[104] Ibid., 39.

hoping that justice will be found in divine retaliation. Once the total hold on the subjects' actions is thus accepted and internalized, it is reasonable that servants should refrain from any kind of disclosure: "[S]upposing the Faults real that are thus exposed to View," the author of *The Servants Calling* contends, "it cannot excuse the Publisher; who being a Servant is as much obliged to guard the Honour, as the Fortune of his Master."[105]

Due to this patriarchal discourse of power and subordination, juridical tracts focusing on witnessing have a strong tendency towards rejecting servants as unreliable observers. Curiously enough, the argument brought in support of this statement is that the intimacy defining their relationship disqualifies deposition from disinterestedness. On the same assumption of objectivity that authenticates scientific truth, juridical discourse builds narratives of exclusion and contestation of that which does not serve the interests of the establishment. One can easily follow the pattern of intentions here: once the reading of the master-servant bond has been made to conform with commonly accepted family standards, and the domestic understood as bound to respond to the master as a son would respond to a father, then the servant's deposition would be rendered, in many cases, unreasonable. It was possible, even as late as 1767, to say, like the author of *Laws Concerning Masters and Servants,* that "Masters and Servants are Relatives."[106] Thus, the production of discipline becomes coherent and clearly aimed at the complete suppression of the servant from the juridical stage. Responding to the complaints formulated by the entire pleiad of critics, texts regulating trial procedures reinforce both masters' security and servants' invisibility. Implicitly, the servant is denied ownership over the keyhole, and the keyhole itself is denied relevance in a discourse which is, nevertheless, concerned with visual proof.

This does not mean that eye-witnesses are pushed completely out of the picture. On the contrary, trials continued to be performed with the fundamental principle in mind that ocular evidence could supply enough factual support for a decision to be made. What was being refuted was, in other words, not the individual's access to truth, but the territory in which that truth had been acquired. This was not a problem of validity, but one of reliability, which annulled the former on a basis that artificially reconstructed the distinction between the two classes by implying that servants and masters were related to the extent of the confusion of their interests.

[105] Ibid, 38.
[106] *Laws Concerning Masters and Servants*, 1.

It is interesting to note that *The Servants Calling* makes a distinction which is absent from Defoe: the disclosure of secrets is made possible by the existence of the secret in the first place. In clarifying this point, the tract suggests that the actions of the master are equally responsible acts, and also identifies the point of origin in the superior's behaviour, which, as stated by Marshall, the servant only "aped." Of course, the servant is not, by this, absolved of the blame for disclosing the secret; but the accusations take a new form by including the master in the assumption of culpability. Although it may be the servant's fault that the secret has reached the public domain, the master is also responsible for having committed the acts which he is trying to hide. Such masters, the author affirms, "are supposed to be weak in their Judgments, and to want capacity to preserve their own Character, or that they have made their Servants Confidents to some of their unlawful Pleasures, or unjust Actions, or secret Follies, whereby they lie at their Mercy as to a Discovery."[107]

[107] *The Servants Calling*, 43.

Chapter 6. The legalized voyeur

Absorption and theatricality in keyhole testimonies

Criminal trials in which the testimony of keyhole witnesses was admitted as evidence provide considerable ground for the application of the principles of absorption and theatricality outlined by Michael Fried (as outlined in Section I). It is necessary to start by pointing out that it was only in the seventeenth century that jurists started looking seriously into the problem of first-hand evidence. Prior to the period, evidence in courts could be gathered from a variety of sources, many of them questionable. Even jurors could at times serve as witnesses, and they often expected to hear circumstantial evidence or (up until the acknowledgement and application of Lockean principles) even hearsay. This problem was gradually resolved in the post-Restoration period, and became regulated in the eighteenth century, to the extent that second-hand information was no longer accepted in court.

> Hearsay evidence [...] had come increasingly under suspicion after 1660, when doubts about the reliability and validity of the testimony of someone who could not be cross-examined were expressed in several state trials in Charles II's reign. By the second quarter of the eighteenth century there had emerged the outlines of a 'hearsay rule' that did not necessarily prevent such evidence from being given in court, but that did at least increase the sensitivity of judges and jurors to its dangers. Hearsay evidence continued to be received in the eighteenth century, and sometimes [...] without the judges apparently cautioning the jury about its character. But by the middle of the century judges more commonly prevented its being given at all.[108]

With the stress on sensorial witnessing, the juridical system in place shifted its interest more and more towards hearing evidence the relevance of which could no longer involve just any type of information one could bring to court. Locke's system of degrees of

[108] J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts,* 363.

probability and his theory of proximity in relation to truth may have had some connection to this important change in legal procedures. J. H. Wigmore estimates that the date when the possibility of ruling out hearsay was introduced in English juridical practices was around 1675-1690.[109] Locke's *Essay* was published in 1690. Even if the two did not actually influence each other, they surely coexisted at the same time as a common intellectual concern. This tends to confirm Wigmore's assertion that it was not until the end of the seventeenth century that magistrates started doubting the quality of witnesses who testified on the basis of second-hand information.

An important clarification, however, needs to be made in relation to the terminology of hearsay. In the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth, witnesses were required to speak *de visu suo et auditu*, based on facts they had seen or heard. The hearing designated by *auditu* refers to the sensorial perception of auditory evidence, and it is very specific about the fact that the data acquired needed to be collected via one's personal sense experience. Contrary to this prescription, the hearsay testimony is based on evidence acquired *ex auditu*, through information gathered from a third party who had presumably witnessed the events first-hand. In this case, *auditu* refers not to aural perception but to acquisition of knowledge from sources which are narrative in nature and are more akin to gossip, calumny, or malicious prosecution. It is the possibility of rebuffing the genuineness of the third party (who was the first repository of knowledge) that generated disbelief and gradually reached the stage where such evidence was excluded from criminal trials. The shift away from hearsay was generated by the increasing interest in depositions where the testimony was the work of independent individuals, whose knowledge of the events did not depend on others, and neither did it originate in others' knowledge of the events under scrutiny. As Wigmore pointed out, "the mark of the witness is knowledge, acquaintance with the fact in issue, and, moreover, knowledge resting on his own observation."[110] (The stress is obviously, on *own*).

By requesting peremptory evidence from witnesses who were likely in the highest degree to have been present at the scene, judicial practices made room for what Michael Fried has considered standards of absorption (where second-hand knowledge is excluded): in order for a scene to be deemed absorptive, it has to involve a beholder, who can only be an eye-witness.

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[109] John H. Wigmore, "The History of the Hearsay Rule," *Harvard Law Review* (vol. 17, no. 7: May, 1904), 445.
[110] Ibid., 437-38.

As Fried has pointed out, Diderot's term *tableau* (a scene cut out of reality, within which key events take place, and which indicate intense activity, as well as the characters' complete immersion in them) was meant to illustrate precisely that the beholder and the beheld were related only insofar as the latter's absence was taken for granted. The purpose of the very framing of a given action was to allow viewers to position themselves outside the picture, to participate in the event as a passive observer and never as an acknowledged actor: "A *tableau* was visible, it could be said to exist, only from the beholder's point of view. But precisely because it was so, it helped persuade the beholder that the actors themselves were unconscious of his presence."[111] We have already seen this type of dynamic at work in microscopical observations, where the movements and behaviour of the specimen were, as long as the specimen itself was kept alive and moving, taken for warrants of their own theatricality, which in turn generated the illusion of objectivity. But that situation was entirely the creation of the beholder, who made possible not only the observation but also the very performance of the scrutinized specimen. Without the intervention of the microscopist, the specimen would not have inhabited that particular setting in which it was found and examined at the time of observation. From this perspective, theatricality itself, in spite of being performed as such by the specimen, can be said to have been entirely the work of the beholder, while the specimen's behaviour was only relevant insofar as it proceeded from the beholder's construction of the scene where the performance was supposed to take place. The action of the specimen is, therefore, conditioned by the presence of the observer, and so Fried's contention that the *tableau* exists "only from the beholder's point of view" finds its most appropriate confirmation.

In the case of keyhole testimonies, where the rules of absorption and theatricality are very similar to those encountered in microscopical circumstances, the situation is slightly different insofar as the presence and role of the beholder are concerned. Although the viewer is still the primary operator, and he/she is the sole producer of an event *qua* theatricality (an event which, in itself, does not take the beholder into consideration, either as active participant or presence), the scene itself is not his/her creation. In other words, it is not the beholder that has brought the actors together and put them into the scene. On the contrary, the unfolding of the event takes place in terms of a total dismissal of the possibility of a beholder ever having existed in the proximity of the scene, and that is because the beholder is not only exterior to that scene, but also independent of it. The

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[111] Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 96.

readers of trial transcripts of this kind must, in order to empathize, exclude the option of the witness's manipulation of the witnessed event. Unlike microscopical observations, where the reader could not dismiss the role of the observer, since it was the observer himself who had generated the entire situation, in keyhole narratives the audience looks as though it were constituted of ignorant spectators.

However, this is not to dismiss the fact that the beholder is acting, in relation to the audience, as one who is programmatically present in the scene. One cannot suspect a beholder in a keyhole situation of innocent viewing, that is, of viewing without an agenda. In the final disclosure (the court testimony) reasons were plentifully available for beholders to make themselves into active participants in the process. However, the entire purpose of their presence in the practice that legitimated juridical discourse was to make possible the illusion that the said agenda did not exist, and consequently, that the audience itself was absent, that "it was not really there or at the very least had not been taken into account."[112]

When deposing against her mistress in a trial for adultery, Eliza Leekes, servant and close attendant of Lady Westmeath, operates precisely within this illusion of the absence of an audience.

> The Witness, continuing her deposition, said, that at Tunbridge, being one day in her own room, which was situated opposite to her Lady's, and the doors of both apartments being open, she saw Mr. Bradshaw put his hand in Lady Westmeath's bosom, a freedom not in the smallest degree resented by her Ladyship."[113]

What is striking in this account is the obvious and total unawareness of the two persons beheld insofar as the presence of a viewer is concerned. This may very well be proof that in fact the open space between the two apartments did not exist in reality, and that the observation of the event could have been made possible by other means, of which peeping through a keyhole is a valid possibility.

This particular trial is of significance because absorption and theatricality featured more than once in depositions, and each time, were conducted by means of a keyhole-like device. John Duigan, a coachman who also deposed as a witness to the plaintiff, produced yet another narrative of sexual transgression of the marriage code, in which,

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[112] Fried, 96.

[113] *Crim. Con. A Narrative of a Late Trial in a Cause of Crim. Con. Wherein the Rt. Hon. George, Lord of Westmeath was Plaintiff, and the Hon. Augustus Cavendish Bradshaw, Defendant*, Dublin: printed by J. Jonson (undated), 5.

again, in spite of the flagrant proximity of strangers to the scene, the adulterers took no precautions and therefore made themselves visible, or rather viewable. Duigan narrated a moment when the unfaithful wife took a customary coach trip to meet on a side street with Mr. Bradshaw, who was picked up in the coach. So the coachman testifies

> [t]hat as the Coach went along, the side-blinds were raised up; that, the day having been wet and cold, the Foot-man got from behind in order to warm himself by walking, but thinking that the Witness drove too slow, he picked up some small stones or pebbles which he threw at him (the coachman) which act of the footman making the witness turn his head about, he beheld through the fore-glasses (the curtain being but half down) Lady Westmeath, her l---s and th---s so baren [sic] that witness saw above her hips, but did not then see Mr. Bradshaw.[114]

Duigan's account is interesting insofar as it constructs a narrative that confirms the accidental character of the witnessing act. The purpose of his pointing out fortuity is of course to exclude the possibility of premeditation, but also to highlight the absorption characterizing the adulterers and the theatricality of their gestures. Only by ignoring the possibility of a viewer acquiring knowledge of their undertakings could the two act freely and unguardedly, as they seem to have done. Only half a page farther down, another deposition is recorded, one that also focuses on a coach affair, in which the absorption of the actors is highlighted once more. In this deposition, William Kennedy, another coachman in the service of the plaintiff, admits having had a much more active role in the visualization of the event, but his account does not change anything insofar as the absentmindedness of the adulterers was concerned.

> [O]ne evening in particular, having taken up Mr. B. on the Circular-road, [Kennedy] looked in at the fore-glass, (having had his curiosity excited by the frequency of these twilight airings) and saw Lady W's. clothes uplifted, and Mr. B. with his breeches down, standing between her Ladyship's thighs.[115]

As in the previous testimony, what is immediately noticeable is the fact that the two adulterers ignored completely the possibility of their actions being noticed. As pointed out by Lawrence Stone, the ubiquity of the servant's presence in eighteenth-century households (where they were "key witnesses to all domestic dramas") led to a desensitization of the master/mistress in relation to the implications of this presence, which was not perceived as a threat to intimacy but rather as normality: part of the dynamics of domesticity. "There was [...] no moment in the day or night," Stone writes,

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[114] Ibid., 7.
[115] Ibid., 8.

"when servants were not coming and going in the private apartments at unpredictable times. Their ubiquity was taken entirely for granted by employers, who in the main ignored their servants except when giving an order or asking them a question."[116] This is apparent in the accounts mentioned above, in which the figure of the servant that emerges is shaped to suit a major requirement of theatrical performance: their presence, as audience to the scene, should not be apparent to the actors performing their private actions, as if on stage.

The need for action cannot pass unnoticed in narratives of the keyhole type, since movement is the essence of a witness's claim of having had encountered an event. Without performance, there is no play; without action, there is no trial. In other words, the very existence of a given court case, which is based on testimony, hinges on theatricality.

The need for action also legitimizes the transgression of the bounds of privacy, which nobody seems to notice in any of the accounts given by keyhole witnesses. The requirements of the juridically-relevant and acceptable testimonies dictate that a witness, in their instantiation as subjects of the legal discourse, must be perfectly justified in breaking into the private space of another.

In a case of sodomy tried at the Old Bailey in January 1745, in which the defendant, Richard Manning, was "indicted for a misdemeanor, in unlawfully, and wickedly laying hands on John Davis, with an intent to commit the detestable sin of sodomy," it is apparent that the need for action is the sole justification of the decision of witnesses (the owners of an inn where the two offenders had lodged) to take a furtive look at the events happening immediately adjacent to their own room. As Sarah Holland, the landlord's wife, deposed, after having pointed out the suspicion aroused in her by the indecent behaviour of the two lodgers:

> I went into the next room where my husband was in bed. There is a wainscot partition between the 2 rooms, about 5 feet high, and the rest is glass, and a curtain to part of it. I looked through the glass, and saw them sitting facing one another with their knees jammed together. I said to my husband, I believed they were sodomites. Then I looked through a thin curtain and saw them kissing one another. A little after I looked in again, and saw Manning's hand in Davis's breeches. I looked in again, and then Davis had his hand in Manning's breeches. After that Manning put his tongue into Davis's mouth: they seeing a candle in my room, got up and went to the window to look if they could see the shade of any body; then they set down again and Davis

[116] Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce. England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 211.

> shewed what he had to Manning; they kissed one another for some time, and then Davis opened his breeches.[117]

The need for action couldn't be better expressed. At first glance, nothing apart from vaguely suspicious behaviour indicated the nature of the event unfolding on the other side of the partition wall. It requires the return of the witness to the place of vision, as if she had not been satisfied with what she had perceived, to bring the action into the foreground. Without this return, the witness would not have had anything to testify, because nothing would have actually happened (not something conceivable and sanctionable in legal terms). Sodomy, it seems, preserves an aura of mystery, and therefore a witness must have confirmation of their suspicion, as if they were dealing with a vision, a doubtful, possibly improbable event. Or, could it be that voyeuristic pleasure was the actual reason behind their return? "Proximity," says George E. Haggerty about witnessed sodomy, "implies guilty association."[118] Sexual or not, personal curiosity is given in this case the weight of legal action, but it is not until a confirmation of the initial suspicion is acquired that the situation can be placed in a proper legal context. The witness's begging for something to happen, for action to become apparent (sexual gratification aside), is illustrative of the extent to which subjects of legal discourses could master the road to testimony.

Once, twice, three times, and more: A case study

As the case above makes apparent, repetitive transgression is a common feature of keyhole testimonies, a feature prompted by a double supposition: on the one hand, the need for the juridical system to acquire confirmations of the witnessed act (thus facilitating decisions in court, based on the amassing of factual evidence); and on the other hand, the need of the same discourse (this time expressed through a desire mirrored in witnesses themselves) to acquire knowledge of action-events. It was usually after not having acquired views of satisfactory theatricality that the beholder returned to

[117] *Old Bailey online*, reference number: t17450116-17
[118] Haggerty, "Keyhole Testimony," 168.

the scene and watched again, often more carefully and with much greater attention to details.

In the trial against Captain Gambier accused of *criminal conversation* with the wife of Admiral Charles Knowles (a case that made many headlines in English newspapers at the time), the maid servant's deposition reveals the fact that she had looked through the keyhole of her mistress's chamber at least four times. Each time, the search for action, theatricality, and physical/optical proof of the adultery is obvious. "Curiosity, my Lord," the recorded account mentions the witness to have said, "led me two or three Times to look through the Key-hole of the Chamber-door, in which I knew Captain *Gambier* and my Mistress lay."[119]

The account of the first peek into the sexual intercourse of the adulterers is marred by an irritating lack of clarity, caused by the presence of an interposing object (the usual barrier to vision that incites keyhole peepers to further their efforts towards acquiring a better vantage point). "(T)he first Time I looked thorough [sic], the Curtains were so close drawn at the Feet of the Bed, that I could not see any Thing," the witness admitted.[120] As expected, her disappointment at not having found the wished-for proof of the adultery urged the servant-turned-witness to have another go at breaching the privacy of her mistress, which in fact happened the very next day. Once again, her action had unsatisfactory results. The only thing she could see was her mistress getting out of bed, motioning to open the window, and then returning to the bed. The inconclusive outcome of the second attempt did not exclude entirely the possibility of the incestuous love. In fact, it could be concluded from Bentley's deposition that, although not seen, Captain Gambier was inside the room, possibly in bed beside the mistress, yet on the side which could not be seen through the aperture. The witness testified that she could hear him talk, albeit not distinctly. Although she acquired some form of sensorial perception (which, in theory, could have been accepted as evidence in court), the servant did not show signs of satisfaction. It is apparent from the frustrated account of the second instance that the servant (whom we find testifying for the plaintiff in spite of her much closer relationship to her mistress) was, at least while deposing under the specific juridical terms required of her, aware of the necessity of gaining evidence that could weigh more heavily in a trial.

[119] *The Proceedings on the Trial of Captain G-------, Late of His Majesty's Ship the Severn, On an Action on the Case wherein the Damages sued for were 10,000 l. For Crim. Con. With Ad----l K-----s's Lady* (London: printed for H. Owen, 1757), 20.
[120] Ibid.

The third time, when auditory evidence seems to be more prominent, the servant's account is enriched with a greater amount of details: “I came to the Bed-chamber Door about half an Hour after Four o'Clock in the Morning. The Captain and my Lady were laughing, playing and talking, they talked partly in *English,* and partly in *French*.”[121] However, the necessary and sufficient evidence, so desired, in the shape of the adulterers being caught in action, has not yet been acquired.

What happens in the fourth and last related instantiation of keyhole curiosity (there may have been more, but the record does not make mention of anything else following this moment) is even more significant, because at this stage the voice of the law can be literally heard, as an intervention in deposition. The account is now filled with an abundance of narrative details. It seems as though the servant finally has something to relate. Thus “The Defendant and my Lady” the deposition continues,

> went out of the Dining-Room into the Bed-chamber, and shut the Door, and there dressed themselves each in a loose Silk Night-gown, and there they played together, and the Captain threw my Lady upon the Bed, and he flung himself upon her; but she disengaged herself, and got off of the Bed, and then they ran several times one after the other round the Room, playing and toying, till at length my Lady was quite tired, which the Defendant taking the Advantage of, flung my Lady on the Bed, and himself, where they covered themselves with the Coverlet.[122]

But then, when the audience had been sufficiently engaged and the narrative had built its necessary suspense, the curtain falls again, and the witness is thrown back into her earlier lack of clarity and certainty: “(T)hey covered themselves with the Coverlet, and I could see no more; and then I came away.”[123] The juridical discourse now grows frustrated with the account, which is threatening to return to the same dead end. So a question is asked, which interrupts the deposition and points it in a different direction: “But when I asked you this Question, Madam, I interrupted you, you was going to relate some other Familiarities which passed between the Defendant and your Lady.” Inconclusive as the evidence has been so far, the keyhole testimony seems now utterly useless, and the response of the re-orientated witness is required to bring clarification, or more precisely, the relevant evidence that the court can accept as proof for the plaintiff. And the answer arrives, to confirm all suspicions and to provide the juridical discourse with what it has been so insistently seeking:

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[121] Ibid., 21.
[122] Ibid., 22.
[123] Ibid.

> *Bentley*. When my Lady received the Captain at Home, she would do it in a loose Dress without her Stays, and sometimes they would play together as Lovers are used to do, and he would feel of her B----sts, and put his Hands through the Slits of her Gown, and up her Petticoats; and my Mistress in Return would tickle the Defendant, beat, pull and strike him amorously, &. These Interviews and Intrigues lasted till the Admiral arrived.[124]

In relation to Elizabeth Bentley testimony, there seems to be some kind of clash between the compulsive repetition of keyhole observations and the narrative of something that is expected to be theatrical. This conflict is generated by the fact that what was supposed to be the most truthful rendition of the affair (the keyhole narrative) is the one that lacked the most in theatricality. No matter how much the witness is said to have dwelt on detailed descriptions of what was happening on the other side of the door, her story is based on mere supposition. There is no material proof that sexual intercourse has in fact taken place between the two adulterers. This is the reason why the unidentified justice (a voice as revelatory as it stays anonymous and depersonalized) feels obliged to interrupt the deposition in order to ask for what has been anticipated all the way. In reminding the witness that the whole purpose of her deposition has been to reveal action unfolding in ignorance of the beholder's presence, the voice of juridical discourse points out the crucial fact that absorption alone is not sufficient, unless it is accompanied by witnessed theatricality. Betty Bentley's testimony indicates, at various points, that some form of action was indeed taking place behind the obstructing walls, but her inability to acquire the visual sight of that action rendered her entire report irrelevant, albeit interesting. However, when the wished-for account is finally presented, the means of observing the events are not specified. Considering the insistence with which the witness had been mentioning the keyhole in the four previous instances, we are led to assume that this time witnessing must have taken place via alternative routes, from which the keyhole may now be excluded. One is reminded of Lawrence Stone's assertion that servants were ubiquitous invisibles, present all the time yet unnoticed. The witness in this trial is an exact instantiation of that phenomenon.

As for the relationship between mistress and servant, it is evident from this account that Betty Bentley exceeded in what could be called deviant service: she not only spied on her mistress while the latter was in her private room, but also helped herself to Lady Knowles's correspondence, as is made apparent later in her deposition, when she admits to having read one letter which the Captain had made the mistake of entrusting her with.

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[124] Ibid., 22-23.

The explanation for her breach of trust in this respect is as striking as it is simple: it happened "for it [the letter] was not sealed."[125] In fact, both cross-examination and the final statement of the defendant's counsel suggest the witness's personal interest in the entire affair and that she might have been trying to take revenge upon her mistress all along: "It will come out of our Witnesses, that the Witness *Bentley* often said, that she would be revenged of her Mistress; particularly she has said, My Mistress, meaning Mrs. *Knowles*, has used me ill, has used me like a Negro."[126]

Theatricality and voyeurism

The need to witness theatrical/absorptive behaviour forms the foundation of voyeurism, which operates in situations where what is at stake is the privacy of the observed individual(s). This is not at all an exclusively seventeenth or eighteenth-century issue. A.C. Spearing indicates that "[w]ithin medieval love-narratives, secret observers, concealed from the lovers as the lovers are from society at large, are frequently responsible for exposing private experience to the public gaze."[127]

What is important, and made apparent with great generosity throughout the keyhole accounts recorded in trial transcripts, is an urge to create a community of voyeurs participating in the furtive pleasures of witnessing. The entire experience of 'witnessing together' is all the more interesting as it is not only encouraged, but also requested by the juridical discourse. It is almost a rule that a direct witness who has just watched the unfolding of a sexual intercourse between extra-marital partners, representatives of the same gender, or even representatives of different species (as in the cases of zoophilia) appeal, as quickly as possible, to the voyeuristic propensities of other individuals available at the moment, many of them complete strangers to the initial witness.

[125] Ibid., 30.
[126] Ibid., 38.
[127] A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

"As soon as she could get out," the Lyddel case narrates, the witness "went and acquainted one of her Fellow Servants, which was the Laundery Maid, that she had seen her Lady with Mr. *Lyddel* against her."[128] A similar urge to gather supplementary witnesses drove the plaintiff in a case of bestiality to leave the scene and rush out in search for others:

> I was surprized and shock'd thereat; and seeing Mr. Campbell smoaking a pipe at the house door, who was a stranger to me, I went up to him, and desired him to step with me to the stable, and told him the occasion, and he went with me, and observed the prisoner's actions in the stable from the window; then Mr. Campbell went away, and brought two other men from a greater distance from the stable than he was when I went to him.[129]

The juridical treatise that enjoyed the widest circulation in the second half of the eighteenth century, Blackstone's *Commentaries,* is very clear with regards to the number of witnesses, and the importance of corroborated testimonies: "One witness (if credible) is *sufficient* evidence to a jury of any single fact; though undoubtedly the concurrence of two or more corroborates the proof."[130] The reference to multiple witnessing functions as a reminder to the witness of the range of risks and challenges that he/she may be subjected to if presented in court as the sole witness. Blackstone mentions admissions of exceptions ("Yet our law considers that there are many transactions to which only one person is privy; and therefore does not *always* demand the testimony of two, as the civil law universally requires."), but the fact remains that, insofar as the number of depositions was concerned, the more the better.[131] The gathering of auxiliary spectators could very well be a practice that allowed the primary witness to vouch for their own innocence in relation to any possible accusations of the solitary enjoyment of voyeuristic pleasures. This is a very important factor in the juridical assessment of keyhole peeping, since, as shown in the beginning of the present section, intrusive sight and hearing were condemned by legal proscriptions, while at the same time encouraged in situations that served the immediate interest of the law.

Freud, who provides the first articulate definition of voyeurism, sees in intrusive beholding a perversion with strict sexual connotations. Scopophilia, the pleasure gained from looking at one's object of sexual desire, is, for Freud, a phenomenon more or less present in every desiring subject. This state of normality can change into perversion (i.e.

128 *An Account of the Tryal of Richard Lyddel, Esq*, 3.

129 *Old Bailey online*, reference number: t17570713-29.

130 Blackstone, *Commentaries II*, 287.

131 Ibid.

becomes *voyeurism*) when looking becomes a means in itself rather than a means to an end, or more precisely: when visual inspection turns away from the aim of 'normal' sexual pleasure, which is copulation. The relevance of the Freudian theorization to eighteenth-century legalized voyeurism is highlighted by the contention that "the pleasure in looking becomes a perversion" if, among other things, "it is connected with the overriding of disgust."[132] Disgust, as well as shame (the other major deterrent of perverse scopophilic inspection), is an external force whose significance is moral in nature: something discursively implanted into the reactions of the witness/beholder. The feeling of shame, Spearing says, is "based on what we believe others to think of us: it is our response to an awareness that we are or may be the object of an unfavourable judgment from outside."[133] In other words, shame is, in relation to keyhole peeping, the reflection of the very act that the witness has been busy performing, and then recounting. The presence of shame or disgust in keyhole testimonies is highlighted by the reference to feigned 'awakenings,' when the viewer pretends that he or she was drawn apart from the scene when they could no longer watch what is said to have been too horrible a spectacle.

In his essay on keyhole testimonies, George E. Haggerty recounts a case which is especially relevant to the present discussion. In this case, the witness testifies to having made full use of the very accessible partition wall that separated his room from the room in which two other men were engaged in homosexual intercourse. He witnesses the illicit act along with a woman who happened to be in the same room, and (surprisingly) a child. After having watched for a while the sexual proceedings between the two men in the neighbouring room, "the Woman, who had been peeping all the while, cry'd out, *I can look no longer, – I am ready to swoon ----- He'll ruin the Boy!*"[134] This outcry is the signal that the voyeuristic contemplation must stop; the tacit enjoyment of the scene's unfolding had reached the point where it risks turning into perversion. As if in anticipation of Freudian psychoanalysis, the witness in this account turns away from the scene in disgust, but not before having looked along with the other voyeurs for a considerable length of time. This example shows that legalized voyeurism is a form of hypocrisy, insofar as it operates by allegedly criticizing its own object. Hypocrisy, as it featured in eighteenth-century novels of domesticity, as well as in trial transcripts where the keyhole was the primary source of

[132] Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. James Strachey et al., 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), vol. VII, 156-57.
[133] Spearing, 10.
[134] Haggerty, *Keyhole Testimony,* 169.

knowledge, can be interpreted, as Jenny Davidson has done, as "the best approximation of virtue,"[135] virtue here involving *not* yielding to the lures of the voyeuristic pleasures entailed by the act of witnessing. Individuals who watch acts hidden from their eyes very often feign repulsion in the same way in which the woman recounted in Haggerty's essay did. This is because they have, apparently, internalized the consequences of the illicitness of their own actions, but also because their own performance is regulated by the juridical rules of conduct to which their deposition is called to address.

Precisely because she turns her face from the event, the witnessing individual reveals her propensity for furtive looking, which is acceptable only insofar as it doesn't cross the threshold of 'normality,' that is, insofar as it does not become perversion. Acceptable voyeurism works very much like normal sexuality, from whence it may have gained its sheen of 'normality'; this is why it is welcomed in trials, in spite of its transgressive nature (in spite of the transgressive nature of sexuality, for that matter).

The peeping moment, by definition, is "hasty, just taking a moment." But it is precisely in this quickness that one must see the seeds of juridical justification for the scopophilic act of witnessing: the peep "is furtive, suggesting that the person knows that he or she is doing something shameful or blameworthy."[136] This readily emphasized disgust or shame at the sight of sodomy (a capital sin and a statutory crime) permits the witness to evaluate her position as non-scopophilic. Based on this evaluation, the discourse of justice makes possible the transition from the desiring subject to the juridical subject, and, at the same time, it legalizes voyeurism, by establishing the limits within which it is acceptable for a testifier to indulge in the pleasures of watching. As long as they are plagued by disgust, witnesses (voyeurs at work, if we go by the definition) can find justification for their intrusive behavior.

What is even more important when disgust becomes apparent, and what puts significant pressure on the viewer, in spite of the fact that the perpetrator is unaware of the witnessing act, is the barrier to vision represented by self-censure. In essence, one may say again, along with Sartre (via A. C. Spearing), that "what deters us from being watchers is the fear of being watched."[137] In the case of keyhole peeping, however, this fear is obviously overcome at times, since witnesses have not withheld their desire to watch. Nevertheless, they do so only within the limits of legal (as well as sexual) acceptability. In normal conditions, this fear, materialized in the form of disgust or

[135] Davidson, *Hypocrisy*, 15.
[136] Peter P. Swire, "Peeping," *Berkeley Technology Law Journal* 24, no. 3 (2009): 1168-69.
[137] Spearing, 10.

shame, is indeed, as Sartre put it, the fear of becoming an object: the almost instinctual reaction against the possibility of becoming an *other* in the eye of somebody who, to us, is him/herself an *other*. The naked body, for instance, probably the most suggestive condition against which viewers defend themselves and against which they are most willing to take precautions, "symbolizes our defenseless state as objects."[138]

Sartre too imagines a keyhole moment, when the person who peeps into a room is surprised by the possibility of a third person seeing him watching (what makes him start is a creak in the wooden floor behind, which may or may not represent the presence of another person). Sartre's purpose is to highlight an existential edification. The realization that he himself may have been watched is, for the initial observer, a moment of 'awakening': the moment when he knows that he is also an object (of another's gaze), not just a subject distinguished by virtue of his being at a safe distance from the contemplated scene. It is shame (the immediate response to the sound made by the wooden floor) that articulates this possibility of becoming an objectified entity, and shame which is the threshold a viewer must be careful not to cross, lest he may become a voyeur.

Justifying the voyeur

The careful sifting of witness credibility presented in court often breaks down in the face of another, more pressing necessity: the need for knowledge. Almost every principle outlined by Blackstone in relation to the acceptability of witnesses finds a lee-way somewhere, which will make possible the breaching of the very legal principle on which the entire discourse had been founded. As Geoffrey Gilbert, Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer said, in his *Law of Evidence* (a work that preceded Blackstone by half a century, but which was only published posthumously, in 1754), "a man can't be said to get or lose

[138] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*; quoted in Spearing, *op. cit.*, 11.

where he has only a precarious Interest."[139] Leading up to the formulation of this statement, Gilbert had been engaged in the customary discussion on the conditions that determine one's acceptance as witness. Gilbert, like many others before and after him, was well aware that the distinction between interested and disinterested witnesses, which made it possible to establish the objectivity of juridical truth, posed the significant danger of counting out almost every person who testified in court, since every witness could be said to have had an interest in the deposition: whether a personal one (e.g. revenge), or one that rests on the abstract concept of commonwealth (by pursuing the good of all). As subject to the discourse which enables him/her to appear in court in the guise of an acceptable witness, the observer is already promoting his/her own interest, which is that of proving to be a good subject. Under such circumstances, there seems to be no escape from suspicion. This procedural difficulty is solved not by insisting on the claim that a witness has no interest in the trial, but by diminishing the relevance of their interest. The 'precarious interest' referred to by Gilbert says precisely this: in the face of universal suspicion the law can bend its astuteness and pretend (hypocritically, cynically) that no intention has led the witness to take up the position of good juridical subject. Facts must not be wasted, Gilbert said in another place in his *Law of Evidence*, where, once again, he had to account for allowances in what concerned the performance of witnesses. He spoke there of evidence gathered from witnesses who were no longer available for cross-examination (either dead or impossible to find). Gilbert asserted that, in such situations, evidence could still be accepted from writs bearing their signatures or from the depositions of others, who had had access to the witness's initial evidence. To conclude, Gilbert conceded that "this is an indulgence of the Chancery beyond the strict rules of the Common Law, and is admitted for the pure Necessity, because Evidence should not be lost."[140]

As made apparent by relevant eighteenth-century juridical literature, peeping, in its auricular instantiation as eavesdropping, was regarded as unacceptable, anti-social behaviour, to which the law was particularly sensitive, albeit not so much so as to raise noticeable alarm. Nuisances, however, found a niche through which they could be legalized, and that is, once again, by helping the law.

The event recounted in Haggarty's case study mentioned earlier is doubly significant, because it involved an inn-keeper, the owner of a public business whose activity was

[139] Geoffrey Gilbert, *The Law of Evidence* (London: printed by Henry Lintot, 1756), vol. I, 124.
[140] Ibid., 62.

connected to interdictions of nuisance. Blackstone made reference to inn-keepers in the same chapter in which he discussed eavesdropping:

> Inns, in particular, being intended for the lodging and receipt of travellers, may be indicted, suppressed, and the inn-keeper fined, if they refuse to entertain a traveller without a very sufficient cause: for thus to frustrate the end of their institution is held to be disorderly behaviour.[141]

What is not mentioned in the text is the eventuality of inn-keepers' beholding their lodgers in ways that are fully sanctionable under the statements concerning eavesdropping. But once again, the law makes room for its self-transgressiveness by allowing inn-keepers to upset, in specific cases, the privacy of their lodgers, provided this upset furthers the materialization of the justice, in other words, if these intrusive landlords served the purpose of acquiring knowledge relevant to the case under legal scrutiny.

In order for this privilege to be given to them, the beholder had to give up his/her own claims to pleasure. In order for voyeurism to be accepted as a warrant, it has to renounce its voyeuristic nature. It has to become its very opposite: not a source of pleasure, not a giving-in to the urge of the senses, but rather an ordered, rational conduct undertaken for the benefit of a discourse, in the name of a common good. Voyeurism, in other words, turns from being an individual experience into being an acceptable practice shared with others (either with co-witnesses or with audiences hearing their testimonies in court).

C18 to C21: A conclusion

It must be stressed that the greatest part of the body of literature on voyeurism (the main focus of which is on twentieth-century manifestations of the phenomenon in filmic and photographic mediums) fails to go beyond the limits set by Freud's definition. Theorist-critics seem only to invest significance in actions where what is preponderant is

[141] Ibid., 168.

the viewing of bodies. Concerned with the recent development of so-called 'video voyeurism,' these texts (mentioned below) engender a particular type of theoretical analysis, which takes into account privacy as an attribute related exclusively to the body.

The Freudian scheme shows bodies subtracted from relevant social relationships, in other words, decontextualized. As in Freud's definition of scopophilia, Lance Rothenberg, for instance, is willing to concede that "[i]n Western society, one of the most fundamental and universal expectations of privacy involves the ability to control exposure of one's body."[142] The same assumption is made by other critics of video-enabled voyeurism, who agree that the phenomenon "involves the surreptitious observance of another person's intimate bodily areas."[143] While accurate insofar as contemporary versions of voyeurism are concerned, these approaches fail to note an aspect of visual transgression which was prominent in the eighteenth century, and that is action.

Generally speaking, the presence of the body is obvious in every single instance of voyeuristic intrusion. There is no denying this, since there can be no voyeurism without bodies to be viewed. However, what sets eighteenth-century cases apart is the fact that the viewer's interest is not in the body as a static or isolated entity. When peepers recorded in trial transcripts or featuring in novels furtively look into the privacy of others, they seem to be looking for what the bodies *do*, not for what they *are*. The significance of the entire experience rests on the ability to isolate an action, which is then placed in a context other than mere contemplation, that is, its juridical assessment. Post-Freudian scholars, especially those who express legalistic concerns with the alleged growth of video voyeurism in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, suggest that the contemporary meaning of voyeurism has shifted from what it meant in the eighteenth-century, when pornography had not yet benefited from the technological developments which will make it a primarily visual experience.

"Equating visibility with truth," as Annette Kuhn has rightly observed, is a tendency that was made possible especially by photography, and its "more general project of

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[142] Rothenberg, Lance E., "Rethinking Privacy: Peeping Toms, Video Voyeurs, and the Failure of Criminal Law to Recognize a Reasonable Expectation of Privacy in the Public Space," *American University Law Review*, vol. 49, issue 5, June 2000, 1127-1165.

[143] Valerie Bell, Craig Hemmers, Benjamin Steiner, "Up Skirts and Down Blouses: A Statutory Analysis of Legislative Responses to Video Voyeurism," *Criminal Justice Studies*, 19, no. 3 (September 2006): 301.

privileging the visible."[144] Prior to the invention of photography, truth was not so much in the visible as it was in the readable. While they still called for visual representations, descriptions of acts of voyeurism were persuasive only insofar as they could answer the wider call for persuasive narrative representations. The difference is, obviously, only in the medium, since the nature of the representation is similar, if not identical. However, major disparities observable in a diachronic approach must not be overlooked, since in them one can find the difference between the contemporary manifestations of voyeuristic pleasures (limited to recording bodies) and those of eighteenth-century precedents, where the stress was on recording the performative theatricality of those bodies. It is not difficult to understand what made the juridical discourse more interested in action, which is the factual foundation of its discourse. For a juridical action to make sense, it needs to deal with bodies engaged in instances of *doing*. The *being* becomes secondary. The mere presence of the body in a given place at a given time is circumstantial evidence, because it cannot, in and by itself, prove the relationship between the act under scrutiny and the person/body assumed to have performed the act. The expectations drawn by this kind of juridical examination are duly mirrored in the performance of witnesses, who do not testify about static bodies, or bodies isolated from their performative significance. When an eighteenth-century witness says that he or she had been drawn to the keyhole, window, or crevice by some suspicion that had preceded their voyeuristic intrusion, he/she does not in the least intend to describe bodies. This is made apparent by the focus on items that are made to hide bodies, namely clothes. In the trial transcript quoted in the previous section of this chapter, a coachman is said to have seen "Lady W's. clothes uplifted, and Mr. B. with his breeches down, standing between her Ladyship's thighs.[145] There is no description of the two bodies here, but only an outlining of their accoutrements, and yet the testimony is far more persuasive. This is because, unlike the evidence provided by the other coachman quoted in the trial transcript, this deposition is concerned with bodies *caught in the act* of sexual intercourse. As proven by the conspicuous obstructiveness of clothes, the actual bodies are not interesting here; they are not relevant to the case, despite their taking up the entire foreground of the tableau. Conversely, when bodies, rather than actions, are prominent, as in the case of the other coachman's testimony, the evidence provided by the witness is not relevant, because there is no action in the description that can prove that a sexual act had actually taken

[144] Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*, Routledge & Kegan Paul (London and New York: 1985), 40.
[145] *Crim. Con.*, 8.

place. The testimony shows a witness who indulges in the (unquoted) pleasure of watching the fully displayed body of the mistress, but there is nothing there apart from this accidental visualization. The woman's "l---s and th---s" were "so baren [sic] that witness saw above her hips," it is said in the transcript; but this, in itself, does not incriminate her in any way, since in a mere naked body there is no evidence of adultery. Moreover, the body here is a body in isolation, devoid of relevant connections to the body of the defendant. The testimony stresses the fact that the witness "did not then see Mr. Bradshaw," which argues further for the defendant and against the witness.[146]

The shortcomings of this testimony set the limits for legalized voyeurism, while at the same time illustrating the priority of performance over presence: of *doing* over *being*. In fact, the relevance of the body's presence is very promptly questioned in the trial, in the characteristic jocular tone of eighteenth-century lawyers, when the witness is cross-examined. "Mr. Currant [the defendant's lawyer], asked the witness *if he was so well acquainted with her Ladyship's th---s, that he would know them from those of any other Lady* – to which the witness replied, *that he had no particular mark to know them by; nor could swear to them, but that he was positive they were her's as no other Lady was in the carriage*."[147] No matter how commonsensical the reply to the lawyer's question seems, it cannot prevent the conclusion that the mere presence of the body is insufficient evidence for the case of adultery tried here. Voyeurism, in this instance, has no acceptable functionality; and the reason why this is so lies in the absence of relevant evidence that an acceptable relationship between the witnessed body and the illicitness with which it is being associated did actually exist.

Voyeurism of this type is founded on the principles of absorption and theatricality, and more on the latter than on the former. In contrast, video voyeurism of the type denounced in contemporary essays places a stronger emphasis on the absorptive side of the phenomenon, since what matters there is not performance, but presence. *Underskirting* and *downblousing*, two concepts defining the very actions mentioned in their names, require that the victims of the voyeur's look be merely present in the place at the moment when the recording is taking place. As explained by Bell *et al.*, most of these cases involve individuals who wait for women wearing short skirts or deep-cleavage blouses to come within their visual field.[148] This takes place in malls and other similar public places, more precisely at the ends of escalating stairs, the respective acts being defined in accordance with the extremity where the voyeur is

[146] Ibid., 7.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Bell, Hemmens, Steiner, "Up Skirts and Down Blouses," 313.

positioned (the bottom end yielding *underskirting*, while the upper end making possible *downblousing*). This type of voyeurism is indiscriminate, since its purpose is to record images of women's body parts, which are then posted online, regardless of the women's identities. Clothes here only become significant insofar as they fail to fulfill their covering role, that is, insofar as they reveal rather than conceal the body. Moreover, this kind of voyeurism requires an almost passive beholder, who cannot even be called a beholder at the moment when the event is taking place, but rather something more akin to a thief, or a pick-pocket. Unlike the contemporary variety enabled by video gadgets, juridically-conscious voyeurism of the type legalized in eighteenth-century trials was much more dynamic. It invested the beholder with agency, by requiring him/her to intrude into the private space of the body. Lack of appropriate technology may have prompted this type of active voyeurism, which was gradually lost with the emergence of video surveillance and the equipment that facilitates video recording. "Window-peeping – the unsophisticated precursor of video voyeurism," was also its more daring predecessor.[149] The much more active beholder, who takes the initiative of intrusion, indicates that the scope of privacy encroached by eighteenth-century voyeurism was a lot wider than what is these days gathered under the same rubric. This impression remains in place even if one were to concede that video voyeurism is "a far more intrusive and disturbing wrong than mere window peeping."[150]

[149] Rothenberg, "Re-Thinking Privacy," 1141.
[150] Ibid., 1145.

SECTION THREE:

Novels

“Where art thou? Be present to my eyes;
dissipate the gloom that perplexes me.”

(William Beckford, *Vathek*)

“I don’t love to be beholden.”

(Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*)

“Vive la bagatelle!”

(Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*)

Argument

In this section I turn to manifestations of the visible/invisible dichotomy apparent in eighteenth-century novels, and how the relationship between reader and text was established by the early specimens of the novel genre. While the previous two sections have each had a special segment on what I consider to be the 'professionals' of the two fields under scrutiny (microscopic observers and juridical witnesses), it is now the novel's turn to illustrate that its discursivity depended on the rise of a special kind of reader who, if not exactly a 'professional' (in the sense of generating expert opinions about the genre's conventions) was nonetheless regarded as an active participant in the process of representation and sense-making. To be more specific, my intention here is to analyze various ways in which textuality opens up to receive the reader within its field of significance. In order to do so I will consider a number of novels that cover most of the century, in order to see whether this tendency was indeed reflective of eighteenth-century novelists' interest in facilitating of a dialogue between reader and text.

I start from the assumption that readership is always conceived of as an invisible entity (individuals over whom authors can have no control, and whose identity they cannot – with very few exceptions – know prior to the production of the text). Dealing with an invisible reader means that the author's task is at the same time to inform, to educate (with regards to the conventions that frame the genre), and to articulate that invisibility as generative of meaning.

The structure of this section is imagined in terms of a gradual progression from general to particular, in a form that resembles the operation of a microscope penetrating into specimens by degrees, in search of the particle where division seems no longer possible. While my attempts here do not aim at mapping divisibility, they follow a trajectory that results from the ways in which vision could be employed in eighteenth-century novels to make the reader respond to gradually adjustable aspects of the text's 'field of vision.' I therefore begin with some observations on what I consider to be the ultimate form of vision: the destructive gaze, as apparent in William Beckford's *Vathek*. These observations will be coupled with a leap back in time, in order to generate a discussion on the type of reader-qua-social-subject addressed by the narrative persona of *The Spectator*: not a novel, but certainly a significant source of textual activism, in which the participation of readers is conceived in terms of their subjection to social order. It will

become apparent from this opening part that my argument here is also concerned with considerations of power relations, some of which exceeded the simple textual relationship and migrated into larger ideological structures. I start this section with two texts situated at either end of the century and the extreme ends of the novel genre because my intention is, on the one hand, to delimit the historical scope of my analysis, and on the other, to inscribe my argument within two conceptual frontiers: the clarity and openness of *The Spectator*, and the obscure, allusive approach of *Vathek*. My concern is how the two interact, and whether they manage to arrive at similar results.

From the wide scope of Mr. Spectator's gaze, which imagined to be all-encompassing, omniscient, and impossible to escape, the reader is transported, with the novels of mid eighteenth-century, into the field of domesticity. Here, events exist in the microclimate formed by household relationships. The favourite topos this time is not society, but the individual, and the setting is not urban but familial (or near-familial). In aid of my argument I return to the trope of the keyhole. Moreover, I regard this trope from the perspective of the so-called 'quest narrative,' a literary species that purports to arrange narrative material so as to respond to the necessity of exploration and discovery. Such a discussion is necessary because the explorative value of the keyhole (making room for the eye to penetrate a situation which seemed initially impenetrable) offers the perfect model for understanding the ways in which eighteenth-century novelists endeavoured to open up narratives in order to allow reader's participation, and to make them observe, in fact, the prerequisites of readerly agency.

The reader's participation, I would suggest, is based on self-control. Since reading has a strong tendency towards dismissing authorial intention in the hope of acquiring a personal grasp on the text's signification, attempts at endowing readers with agency are, at the same time, attempts at taming their centrifugal drive. Here I turn my attention to aspects to do with characters' movements in domestic settings, which call for readers with good knowledge about the arrangements of bourgeois households. There are several aspects to eighteenth-century interiors which could invite inquisitive viewers to inspect a house in search of intriguing events. I argue that details of interior decoration may have played a major symbolic role in titillating curiosity and causing visual explorations, which then became important sources of narrative material. A paradox of the eighteenth-century domestic novel is that although the reader addressed by these literary productions is expected to be responsive to interior settings, very little of these interiors is actually described. This leads me to the conclusion that eighteenth-century novelists were less

interested in atmosphere and more in incidents. This is one of the reasons why *Pamela*, a novel with very little 'outdoor plot,' remains silent as to the interior details that make up the environment in which characters move, often with stunning rapidity. Another reason why *Pamela* lacks details of interior architecture is that the novel operates within the field of subjectivity, keeping the reader very close to the emotional evolution of the heroine, through a tight first-person narration. This type of focalization, I argue, creates tension in the text, which finds escape routes in moments when the heroine loses control over the firmly guarded narration. These are the moments when the novel makes room for the reader to intervene and to take over the narrative task of filling in the gaps marked by the narrator's absence. I consider these to be the second instantiation of readerly participation in textual matters.

From *Pamela* and domesticity, my argument moves to what could be a complication of Richardson's predilection for the interior of the heroine's mind. My next stop is Charlotte Lennox' *The Female Quixote*, where I discuss the presence of narrative voice and especially the didactic scope of its interventions, aimed at educating a young readership, but also at pointing out the manner in which the novel should be read. Juggling constantly with the generic distinctions between romance and novel, *The Female Quixote* has a clear promotional agenda behind. It advocates the new novel genre, the product of disputes between (primarily) Richardson and Fielding, who promoted new kinds of writing as ultimate generic challenges. While not as talented or as driven as her two male counterparts, Charlotte Lennox significantly participated in this movement. Her novel shows, as one critic has noted, that the matter of dispute in *The Female Quixote* is not the distinction between fiction and reality, but between the two competing genres, one of which is favoured to win the fight. My chapter on Lennox's novel suggests a further progression from Richardson's domestic treatment of the genre, where narration took place as if on the surface of reality. While perpetuating some of the tropes of *Pamela, The Female Quixote* also indicates a peculiar immersion of the reader in the text, which is facilitated by the patronising interventions of the narrative voice.

The futher stage of my argument is preoccupied with pornography. The focus here is John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure,* and the purpose is to examine the ways in which readers are made to cope with the descriptive deficiencies posed by pornographic representations, divided between moral predicaments and libertine escapades. By revealing the text's incompleteness, pornography asks for the participation of the person

who reads, and who is invested with the power to formulate the unspoken, or the invisible.

A similar kind of incompleteness forms the focal point of the last segment of this section, concerned with Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. I examine here how typographical techniques work towards clearing the ground for reader's involvement. My analysis is largely concerned with the 'blank page' of *Tristram Shandy* (6.38), which offers a consistent model of interpretation for the general aspect of the new text-reader relationship.

Through these segmenting stopovers, I hope to illustrate the fact that the rapport between reader and text was an important concern of eighteenth-century novelists who, for the first time, raised the possibility of motivating their narrative choices by addressing these unknown participants on whom the very meaning of the text depended. For continuity's sake I proceed by observing that voyeurism (the concept where I left the preceding section) was an issue of huge relevance to eighteenth-century novels, just as much as it was to the developing juridical discourse.

Chapter 7. Sight and site

On literary voyeurism in C18

Voyeurism seems to have been one of the most fundamental aspects of the novel genre throughout the early modern period, and especially in the eighteenth century. In this period one may identify, as Kathryn King has done, a "generic propensity of the novel to regard itself a trespasser in private places."[1] While curiosity may have been, at its most basic level, a means of moving the plot forward, there existed an equally strong tendency towards pushing the boundaries of mere narrative necessity into a territory where what was truly at stake was visual pleasure of the voyeuristic type.

After having regarded Eliza Haywood's *A Spy Upon the Conjurer* (1729) as a source of narrative desire in which the protagonist takes curiosity literally, as a means of acquiring knowledge, King notes that "[o]ne is struck [...] by the rapt attention to the process of getting one's hands on the potentially scandalous bits, to details that would have been needless were their purpose simply to move the narrative along."[2] Haywood is, indeed, throughout the book, busy investing her female narrator with a curiosity that transgresses most of the tenets of privacy, from letter-opening to keyhole-peeping. The point made by King is that the prying and peering abilities conjured up by this type of fiction, in which domesticity is turned inside-out by an overly-curious narrator and/or protagonist, evoke an equal desire for visual pleasures in the reader. In fact, "[Haywood's] prodigious inquisitiveness is also, perhaps, a figure for the early novel itself, for its generic tendency to peer through chink holes and to seek out the scandal that less inquiring literary forms eschew."[3]

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[1] Kathryn R. King, "Spying Upon the Conjurer: Haywood, Curiosity, and 'The Novel' in the 1720s," *Studies in the Novel* 30, no. 2 (1998): 180.
[2] King, "Spying Upon the Conjurer," 187.
[3] Ibid.

In other words, curiosity and the taste for the outrageous (indecent, disreputable, wicked) are somehow inscribed in the genetic code of novelistic discourse, an aspect which, like the DNA spiral, has travelled through the history of the genre and has never left its quarters.

Barbara M. Benedict is of the same opinion with regards to the statutory significance of curiosity in the literature of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, when female novelists in particular, such as Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley and Eliza Haywood, "find a cultural space for spying in the novel."[4] Benedict links the emerging desire to satisfy one's visual lust via reading novels to the consolidation of the discourse of natural sciences, and their tendency towards sparing no efforts in the process of knowledge acquisition. Early novelists, she contends, "use the contemporary endorsement of inquiry in the New Science to exploit new kinds of visual lust and new representations of peeping, and to provide an ideology for the publication of sexual novels, works vaunting empirical exploration, sensation, and novelty itself."[5] To attain the purpose of mixing together a desire to know and an equally strong "desire to be aroused," the trio Behn-Manley-Haywood conceptualized their narrative voices in ways similar to the proponents of late-seventeenth-century experimental philosophy, that is, by creating an aura of objectivity which could warrant the truth of their romances, while at the same time endowing their seemingly dubious (exotic and therefore out of touch) narrative matter with a much-needed authority:

> The way to avoid accusations of atheism or pandering was to adopt the self-consciously pedantic, literalistic, non-combative narrative tone epitomized by the prolific Puritan Robert Boyle and vaunted by the Royal Society. This technique unified the audience in practical experience of the evident truth and ostensibly drained prurience from probing.[6]

Such improvement registered at the level of common sense would have permitted consumers of literature in general to place their act of reading within a context cleansed of former tendencies to recoil at the sight of the unsightly. Microscopy was one of those fields that made possible the enlargement of the horizon of knowledge so as to convert signifiers of prurience into an increasingly transparent public discourse. Yet microscopy was not alone in this adventure. Medicine, for instance, with its intensification and then

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[4] Barbara M. Benedict, "The Curious Genre: Female Inquiry in Amatory Fiction," *Studies in the Novel* 30.2 (1998): 194.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Benedict, "The Curious Genre," 196.

proliferation of the process of visualisation (not only through visually-enhanced tracts but also through public demonstrations and experiments), served the same purpose. Practices of this kind brought about a phenomenon which was essentially voyeuristic in nature – a process whereby the pleasure gained by practitioners was derived from seeing without being seen.

This type of inquisitiveness is to be found, obviously, in erotic literature, where the pornographic conventions of display often require the presence of a hidden witness capable of testifying for the truthfulness and naturalness of the erotic scene. I will discuss certain aspects pertaining to pornography later, but for now it needs to be said that literary voyeurism *is*, and *was* throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ubiquitous, insofar as traces of it could be found in a variety of circumstances. Take the case of the highly refined and abstract pleasures of the Caliph in William Beckford's *Vathek*. In the debut of the novella, the reader is told how Vathek, "ninth Caliph of the race of the Abassides," has commissioned the erection of the highest tower on earth, a building of 11,000 stairs, the construction of which even has divine authorization (it is curious to see the extent to which the caliph assumes his exaggerated taste for the grandiose, as the great prophet Mahomet muses: "Let us leave him to himself").[7] The tower is finished with the help of genii. Then, very soon after the completion of the architectural task, comes the realisation of the true scope of this exceptional erection:

> His pride arrived at its height when, having ascended for the first time the eleven thousand stairs of his tower, he cast his eyes below, and beheld men not larger than pismires, mountains than shells, and cities than bee-hives. The idea which such an elevation inspired of his own grandeur completely bewildered him; he was almost ready to adore himself.[8]

The first things one notices here are the references to materials of natural philosophy (microscopy in particular): ants, shells, bees. The order of things is changed by placing man at the same level as insects and molluscs. Something akin to this was performed in early-modern microscopy, where specimens were often represented anthropomorphically, thus levelling up the order of nature and rendering any hierarchy inoperative.

One next notices that when Vathek climbs the numerous stairs of his tower he does so in order to exercise not a controlling gaze, but a gaze taken to the utmost limits of

[7] William Beckford, "Vathek: An Arabian Tale," in *Shorter Novels of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Philip Henderson (London, New York: Everyman's Library, 1967): 197.
[8] Ibid.

aesthetics, politics, and epistemics – a gaze that makes it possible for him to become an all-knowing eye (with all the pleasures and benefits resulting from such intriguing status). Once again, one finds oneself within the scope of early-modern science, where knowledge was being accounted in terms of accessibility by expanding the possibilities of inquiry so as to cover as much as possible of disturbingly vast, yet hugely motivating invisibilia. This gaze is made apparent in the very first paragraph of Beckford's novella, when the hero emerges as the possessor of a special ability to destroy through visual contact:

> [W]hen he was angry one of his eyes became so terrible that no person could bear to hold it, and the wretch upon whom it was fixed instantly fell backward, and sometimes expired. For fear, however, of depopulating his dominions and making his palace desolate, he but rarely gave way to his anger.[9]

The understanding of the Caliph's visual inclinations, which are overly fairytale-like and therefore hard to situate within the realistic framework of eighteenth-century novel production, may be greatly facilitated if one reads them against a similar instantiation, this time from the twentieth century, in which voyeurism is stated in comparable terms. So Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, describes an analogous case of vision from above, equally spectacular and with equivalent implications: New York as seen from the top of World Trade Centre.

> When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more.[10]

The similarities are striking. In the case of de Certeau, as in Beckford, contemplation from beyond the limits of contemplativeness marks a movement away from the mundane, and an extension into the rarefied strata of divine omniscience. Elevation means distance, but at the same time it means "a solar Eye" for which the only relevance resides in the pleasure of acknowledging one's position. This type of enjoyment cannot

[9] Beckford, "Vathek," 195.

[10] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

be anything but voyeuristic, since vision is applied to an object that remains ignorant of its being an object, of its being watched by that invisible eye. It is, however, a special type of voyeurism, because gratification itself does not result from the admiration of that object, but from the beholder's recognition of his being situated out of reach. This out-of-reachness is arguably a feature of all voyeuristic inspections. What is different in these cases, in Beckford as well as in de Certeau, is the fact that the object matters much than it would in normal voyeuristic circumstances. One may even say that it is not accounted for at all. Instead, attention is exclusively focused on the pleasure gained from knowing that one is secure in one's voyeuristic solitude, that one exists in a coincidental time but incongruent space, experiencing the world as distant, self-absorbed minuteness (as microscopic matter).

From Beckford to de Certeau may seem too much of a stretch, however it must be said that *Vathek* is not a typical eighteenth-century novelistic enterprise. The rich phantasmagoria created by Beckford, in which out-of-this-world characters perform out-of-this-world deeds, goes well beyond the sensorialism of the search for visual pleasure noticeable in Swift, Richardson, Fielding, or even Sterne. If *Vathek* is not emblematic of eighteenth-century novels, this might be due, among other things, to the Babylonic tower constructed in the beginning of the narrative in order for the protagonist to acquire views that transgress human capabilities. Here, sensations do not work in ways that resemble natural abilities. They are placed in relation to each other according to what Alan Liu calls "sensory disorganization."[11] Reference to *Vathek* is necessary because this odd little text is capable of representing the utmost limit of voyeurism, a limit which could not have been reached by the most grandiose architecture (Liu notes that "*Vathek*'s universe is almost wholly architectural") without growing at odds with a human dimension.[12]

Because of this disconnection from human capabilities, Vathek's eye does not control: it simply destroys. It sometimes looks as though this destructive power is not even under his control, or, to put it differently, that the destruction is not performed by any act of volition. It is rather an effect of his exaggerated sense of sight (the sight that does not see – if I am reading de Certeau correctly).

Destruction by sight, a Gorgon-like faculty, is not to be compared with the eighteenth-century gaze, which is spying, transformative, controlling, and many other things in the spectrum of policing, but not annihilating, in other words damaging but not

[11] Alan Liu, "Toward a Theory of Common Sense: Beckford's *Vathek* and Johnson's *Rasselas*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 26.2 (1984): 185.
[12] Liu, "Toward a Theory of Common Sense," 188.

devastating.[13] This makes it possible for us to read the hero Vathek as an inverted Gulliver-in-Lilliput. In the land of the minute, Gulliver experiences the same anxiety about his own destructive powers (see the urinating scene, where although physical destruction is hindered, the effects are utterly detrimental to the hero). But unlike Vathek, Gulliver resolves this anxiety in an ethical frame. Vathek has no desire to help his subjects, just as much as he has no desire to speak to them. In order to impede destruction he simply resolves to temper his ability to raze. In fact, Vathek's tower was not even constructed with his subjects in mind, but rather to satisfy his own exaggerated sensorial needs. His gaze is not directed downwards but upwards, in search for that which is greater than his own greatness (Liu must be cited again here: "Vathek represents himself as belonging to a larger order of things"[14]). The pain that comes with the realisation that he is smaller than the stars above is healed quickly by the soothing thought of his relative greatness: "the thought of being greater in the eyes of others."[15] Because of this, Vathek does not communicate with his subjects directly. His divinely-sanctioned magical powers are a kind of intermediary that makes interaction possible, but the interaction is rarely beneficial to the subject. In some sense, *Vathek* is the allegory of supremely alienated power: a power so great that it is no longer interested in the management of its own structure. In this logic, little matters if the gaze constructs or destructs, since the subject's[16] self-assessment is performed in full ignorance of the object. (The realisation of the hero's destructiveness is a matter that shows itself to the reader of *Vathek,* but not to Vathek himself).

It matters, however, that Vathek's destructive sight is monocular. This begs another comparison to microscopy, where the eye of the observer is an entity which exceeds the limits and dimensions of the observed object, and where one might be tempted to interpret the power to see as a power reaching beyond any controlling attributes, or power conceived, in de Certeau's terms, as "the lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more." The single eye employed in observation indicates both a reduction of perceptive capability and an intensification of performance (if one eye is sufficient, imagine what

[13] As a (hopefully) meaningful digression, one might take into consideration that at its origins 'Gorgon' was intimately related to the idea of terror, that is, terror of sight. The Greek word that engendered the name of the mythological character, *gorgós,* translates as 'dreadful.' Vathek's eye, in the paragraph quoted, is "so terrible that no person could bear to hold it."
[14] Liu, "Toward a Theory of Common Sense," 187.
[15] Beckford, "Vathek," 197.
[16] By "subject," here, I mean not the subaltern, but the conscious self.

two could do!). As Maurice Merleau-Ponty remarks: "[M]onocular images *are* not in the same sense that the thing perceived with both eyes *is*. They are phantoms and it is real; they are pre-things and it is the thing; they vanish when we pass to normal vision and re-enter into the thing as into their daylight truth."[17]

But, as de Certeau continues, the distancing of the viewer from the object of his observation is a guarantee of voyeurism. We can see that, should Freud's definition (discussed in the preceding section) be taken as a measuring rod, then turning vision into an end to itself makes that vision perverse. The perversity of de Certeau's and Vathek's visions consists precisely in magnifying the distance between the subject and the object to such an extent that their reconnection becomes humanly impossible. This is, of course, a matter of positioning the viewing subject at a superhuman height, thus making *him too* perversely irrelevant to the observed world. So Certeau says at the end of his contemplation:

> On the 110th floor, a poster, sphinx-like, addresses an enigmatic message to the pedestrian who is for an instant transformed into a visionary: It's hard to be down when you're up.[18]

This slogan would make a lot of sense if posted at the summit of Vathek's 11,000-step tower. It would spell out the impossibility that the Caliph is facing without knowing: the impossibility of being less than he is (in spite of his astral downgrading), coupled with the impossibility of being more. In fact, let us not forget that the vicious attribute of his destructive eye has no effect on the grotesque Giaour, his proximal superior, nor on Mahomet-the-adjudicator, who had endowed Vathek with divine consent without even informing him of this celestial benificence. This limitation points up, once again, that *Vathek* is not a text that is illustrative of the eighteenth century. What *is* of the eighteenth century (and therefore non-*Vathek,* although it encapsulates Beckford's tendency towards exaggerating sensorial data) is the more mundane version of this all-powerful eye: the controlling super-vision whose ability to see manifests itself as a political ability to model citizens into tamed subjects.

Foucault-inspired criticism has regarded literary manifestations of voyeurism in light of this essentially political desire to create self-regulating subjects, for whom a public watchdog spying on their actions served as a means to internalize techniques of self-control and self-fashioning. Returning to the beginning of the eighteenth century, Scott

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[17] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 7.
[18] de Certeau, "The Practice of Everyday Life," 93.

Paul Gordon illustrates this tendency through an interesting discussion of panoptical manifestations in the texts of *The Spectator* (1711-1712). Ahead of its time, so it seems, *The Spectator* was able to juggle, Gordon argues, with the idea of casting a watchful eye upon its readers and thus creating in them a current of self-restraint. The supervisory body represented by Mr. Spectator, a character-narrator turned technology of surveillance, is not unlike what Vathek will become at the end of the century: "an invisible but omnipresent God-figure who can observe all his readers simultaneously."[19] Insinuating himself as a ubiquitous eye ("watching, discriminating, denouncing"[20]), Mr. Spectator is said to have worked to regulate an eminently urban impasse: the impossibility of the controlling body being physically present at the time and in the space of all the acts of supervision that it professes to perform (something that was easily attainable in rural settings, where local clergymen could enact their visual authority by remaining visible to their parishioners not only during sermons but also throughout their daily lives).

> The early eighteenth-century periodicals, including the *Spectator*, monitor London by means of invisible rather than visible watchers. By convincing readers that the city teems with invisible informants, ready to report any transgression, these periodicals aim to motivate readers – made to fear that any offense will be publicly exposed – to pre-emptively discipline themselves.[21]

Gordon builds his argument around the concept of absence, a variation of the trope of distance, precondition of voyeurism: "Mr. Spectator's surveillance regime deploys absence as a reformist weapon. He regulates early eighteenth-century London by disappearing from sight." The process is consolidated, for doubled efficiency, by a manifest concealment of the overseer's identity, which is equivalent to concealing his very presence. So much so that, faceless and "safely invisible," the elusive Mr. Spectator "wields his 'Intelligence' as a threat." [22]

It is this kind of threat that Foucault highlights in his discussion of 'Panopticism': the menace of the plague requires the instauration of a state of emergency. In such a state, all rights are cancelled and all laws become inoperative. As a consequence, the automatic submission of all subjects to a system of cleansing passes unchallenged, while cleansing itself is equally concerned with health as well as with power. Foucault remarks upon

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[19] Scott Paul Gordon, "Voyeuristic Dreams: Mr. Spectator and the Power of Spectacle," *Eighteenth Century* 36.1 (1995): 3.
[20] Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1951), 140.
[21] Gordon, "Voyeuristic Dreams," 6-7.
[22] Ibid., 11.

"[t]he plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchies, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies – this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city."[23] A "plague-stricken town" and a Mr. Spectator-stricken London seem to be one and the same thing, so far as the subjects are objects of observation and subjects for writing. The efficiency of power distribution rests, Foucault says, on the clarification of boundaries: who is in charge and who is ruled:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles [of the ruler and the ruled]; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.[24]

This paradoxically omnipresent yet invisible figure modelling the comportment of early eighteenth-century Londoners, a "polygraph of everyday life" (as has been said about his French counterpart, Marivaux's 1721 *Le Spectateur français,* but which is also true of the English original), is, therefore, not a creature of domesticity.[25] He operates at its best in the open air of disconsolate urbanity, dealing with the fraudulent and the immoral, with the mores of his time and space. To this extent he is doomed (says Virginia Woolf), along with Joseph Addison, to remain forever caught up in the mesh of his own period, his counsels forever "addressed to ladies in hoops and gentlemen in wigs."[26] For this reason, Mr. Spectator, or any other *spectateur*, for that matter, "likes the profusion of occasions, the thronging of events."[27] Like Vathek, who will represent the proto-Romantic hero, with the eye on the world but the mind in the higher spheres, the Spectator could not enter domesticity, in spite of the often employed domestic subjects of the essays included in the publication. But unlike Vathek, he is caught up in the very fine network of relationships generated by his presence, which often leaves less room for his mind and more for his eye.

It is the weight of the event, of the 'new' bursting into existence, of the incident happening all of a sudden, that generates the writerly interest characteristic of the novel

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[23] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 198.
[24] Ibid., 202-203.
[25] Pierre Saint-Amand, *The Pursuit of Laziness. An Idle Interpretation of the Enlightenment*, tr. Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 18.
[26] Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 136.
[27] Saint-Amand, *The Pursuit of Laziness*, 23.

genre. The spying authority of the invisible eye which had motivated the confidence of Mr. Spectator's voice was eventually transported into the productions of the mid-century, where domesticity was the primary concern, and where the curiosity of the reader followed the actions of the protagonists from close quarters. There, one could find a Mr. B making himself invisible by hiding in closets whence he could conveniently watch Pamela undressing or listen to her conversations with various other characters. That this hidden eye is a threat (Mr. B operates within the confines of a domesticity that he owns by right) is literally emphasized in Richardson's novel, where the heroine expresses anxiety in relation to the dangerous possibilities that lie behind closed doors. By crying "I don't love to be beholden," the over-cognisant Pamela confirms and acknowledges the spotlight in which she has been placed by the invisible authority which not only regulates her movements, but also makes her behave as a cooperative subject. But this is not just the authority of Mr. B, over whom, at many and often awkward moments, she seems to have better control than is reciprocally the case. The authority that truly shapes Pamela's behaviour arises from her consciousness of being a character. If she does express anxiety about being watched, as she does, it is because the situation in which she is placed becomes too hard to bear: with the master and the reader watching at the same time, the heroine (who is aware of both presences) is unable to make a decision as to where (or more precisely, to whom) to direct her performance. The awareness she has of being watched (and she is watched by a multitude of eyes, even by the eyes of a "horrid bull, staring me full in the face"[28]) is that of an object growing aware of being an object, not unlike Gulliver in Brobdingnag behaving as if he were an insect under examination.

Pamela, in other words, offers to novel readers the perspective of conduct literature: how to behave when one's behaviour is the object of others' inquisition, or, as Andrea Haslanger has put it, when one lives in "a world of being watched all the time and having to be merry regardless of circumstances."[29] This is why readers find themselves caught up in a very complicated network of visual trajectories, a kind of triangulation in which he/she watches Pamela being watched by Mr. B, and knowing that she is being watched (not only by her master, but by her reader too). What this means, when seen against the early-century *Spectator*, is that the perusal of idiosyncrasies is now performed through a much closer focus, which is made possible by the inclusion of domesticity in the scheme of supervision. From the wide, public view of Mr. Spectator to the claustrophobic,

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[28] Richardson, *Pamela*, 191.

[29] Andrea Haslanger, "What Happens When Pornography Ends in Marriage: The Uniformity of Pleasure in *Fanny Hill,*" *ELH* 78 (2011): 164.

exquisitely narrow frame of Pamela's routines, vision achieves a type of progression that resembles microscopic focalisation. It registers a movement from city to household, from open air to enclosed perimeters. And, in doing so, the novel enters a space which is the fief of the eighteenth-century domestic voyeur, where a variety of visual devices helps one to divulge secrets and to expose the invisibility of household relations.

Closure and disclosure: Interior space and the invitation to watch

To speak of domesticity is to speak of a variety of elements that make up the relationships between the occupants of a household. Discussions of eighteenth-century domesticity have focussed on hierarchies, discursive practices, and manifestations of power among the participants in domestic games. While these are all apt approaches to the problem in its general terms, I now turn to an aspect that is much closer to the materiality of the domestic space: interior architecture.

In what follows I discuss a number of elements of eighteenth-century architecture which facilitated visual encounters with the invisible. My argument is that practices of exposure, which became apparent in novels of the period, were strongly motivated by the opportunities inadvertently offered to curious observers by the 'rhetoric' of interior architecture. While generally conceived as modalities of self-exposure for the sake of social distinction, such architectural elements also reconfigured the idea of intimacy by being employed so as to suggest penetrability, or transparency. Revealed as essentially easy to access, an interior of this type would have presented itself as a territory open for exploration, one that invited viewing not only during the usual occasions for display (balls, receptions, private visits), but also in moments of unfolding everyday life.

Palladian architects in post-Restoration England often emphasized the importance of what was called, by its Italian name, a *vista*. In relation to interior architecture (because *vista* was also employed to denominate landscape arrangements, as well as the placing of windows so as to visualise the outdoors), the vista was an architectural alignment of

adjoining inhabitable spaces constructed so as to permit the view of an entire row of rooms situated along a common axis. More precisely, the doors of such rooms, when open, allowed one to see all the linear arrangements of space, thus revealing facts about the fluid structure of the property. The model was mostly employed in country houses, since London and other large urban conglomerates could not afford such expansive possessions, due to lack of disposable urban space. As outlined by Amanda Vickery, the lack of space meant lack of means for cutting out one's living perimeter, which further translated into lack of intimacy: "Living cheek by jowl with comparative strangers robbed the London house of any automatic association with privacy as we understand it. [...] The capital was so overwhelmed with population that teeming, multi-occupied houses were commonplace. [...] In short, most Londoners, both rich and poor, lived in rented accommodation where space was at a premium."[30]

Unlike metropolitan places, country houses afforded an incredible display of domestic space, which could (and *did*) assume exorbitant social functions: "The country seat was a power centre, a showplace for the display of authority. As a result, it tended to be built and lived in in a manner which would impress visitors. It was here, out in the countryside, not in the townhouse in London, that the real extravagance took place."[31] The *vista* worked towards the consolidation of this social need for distinction through display, but at the same time initiated a dangerous process of examination, whereby interiors were subjected to a battery of visual intrusions aimed at replicating the openness of the architectural device.

The key factor in this process is the servant. As noted in the previous section, the servants of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries featured as symbols of rejection. Right before the turn of the eighteenth century, new architectural developments, made possible in England by the translation and enthusiastic reception of the work of sixteenth-century Venetian architect Andrea Palladio, demanded that servants be pushed farther away from the dwellings of their masters. In his second book on architecture, translated only in 1715, but which had circulated earlier in its Latin version in England as well as on the continent, Palladio had indicated that the functions of a house should not be mistaken for its visibleness. On the contrary, it was recommended that efforts should

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[30] Amanda Vickery, "An Englishman's Home is His Castle? Thresholds, Boundaries and Privacies in the Eighteenth-Century London House," *Past and Present* 199 (May 2008): 158.
[31] Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 299.

be made to conceal everything that stood at the foundation of social exposure, or in other words, the entire infrastructure on which it rested.

> To make Houses convenient to a Family (without which they cannot be approv'd of by any body) one must take a great deal of care, not only in what concerns the chief parts of them, *viz* the Entries, Halls, Courts, great Rooms, light Stair-cases (spacious and easie to go up and down) but also that the meanest and least beautiful of them may be situated commodiously to serve the other greater and more considerable Apartments.[32]

By the meanest and least beautiful elements of a house Palladio meant kitchens, cellars, laundries, and servants' apartments. His instructions were drastic as to the placement of such functions within a grand country house, which was meant to function like the tip of an iceberg for the maintenance of a multitude of indispensable, if unsightly, operations:"

> [W]e must contrive a Building in such a manner, that the finest and most noble parts of it be the most expos'd to publick view, and the less agreeable dispos'd in by-places, and remov'd from sight as much as possible; because thither ought to be carry'd the refuse of the house, and whatever may produce an ill effect or embarrassment. [33]

The Palladian model, as this fragment makes apparent, was one based on power relations, in which exclusion featured as the major technique for self-fashioning.

Following Palladio, eighteenth-century architects in both England and France placed considerable emphasis on the fluidity of space.[34] The elites in both countries found that "the notion of interconnected rooms was ideal" for the "perpetual display of wealth and power" they required. Consequently the *vista* (known to the French as *enfilade*) was employed to organize space for simultaneous visualisation:

> A home's layout centred on one or several long rows of rooms, each with a door leading directly into the next. [...] The doors were precisely aligned so

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[32] Nicholas du Bois, tr., *The Architecture of A. Palladio; Book the Second. Containing the Designs of several Houses which he has Built either in Town, or in the Country* (London, 1715), 2.
[33] du Bois, *The Architecture of A. Palladio*, 2-3.
[34] This is illustrated by the French *appartement*, a sequence made up of *antechambre, chambre* and *cabinet*, which when employed in England took the names *withdrawing chamber, bedchamber,* and *closet*. The translation was approximate, since the French *cabinet* and the English *closet* were differentiated in their degrees of privacy and accessibility. "An English bedchamber of any size almost invariably had a room leading out of it, sometimes an inner chamber with a bed in it for a child or a servant, sometimes a closet for private study or prayer. Such rooms were useful but not essential. French *cabinets* were essential, because they were *the* private rooms. To get into the *cabinet* of a monarch or great man one had to be in the inner ring of power." (Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 128).

> that when they were all open, a visitor had a clear view from the first room to the last. Every status of symbol – every one of the family's possessions, every proof of the owner's affluence – could thus be taken in at a glance.[35]

Because these spaces were concomitantly visible, they occupied a perimeter on which the gaze of the visitor could dwell panoramically. They formed an architectural conglomerate which was conceived as a unity, and which could not be disturbed by any interference from the meaner sort of person. The household was not imagined as a place for all, but a place centred entirely on its exhibitory potential. The human element was often excluded, unless it was itself made into an exhibited object, while its daily movements were transformed into a procession along elongated interior pathways.

As a consequence of this taste for the display of interconnected spaces, it also became necessary to remove the servants and other menial services to the furthest recesses of the house. But the factors that kept the servants away from the visible side of domestic life also invited them to cross the barriers erected in their way. The *vista* itself was one such invitation. A space which was made available and arranged in such a way as to seem easy to penetrate (the illusion of perspective consists precisely in suggesting that the backward recess of visible objects is a natural phenomenon) could only whet the appetite for secret knowledge, of which servants were customarily accused.

On the other hand, as pointed out by Joan DeJean, servants could make use of hidden passages to reach the lodgings of their masters. Such secret passages, called *dégagements*, were created in order to allow the occupants of the house (not only servants, but their masters as well) to operate within the house out of sight.[36] In forcing the servants to take these concealed routes to the bedchambers of their masters, interior architecture was in fact opening up for them the unique possibility of having access to a secrecy that was denied themselves. Servants were quite privileged in this respect, since they were the only ones, apart from their masters or mistresses, who knew how to access these spaces, which were built in such a way as to make it exquisitely difficult for anybody else to even know of their existence.

The appeal of secret passages finds literary correllation in Samuel Johnson's *Rasellas*, where the hidden palace in which the protagonist spends the early part of his life is described "as if suspicion herself had dictated the plan":

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[35] Joan E. DeJean, *The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual – And the Modern Home Began* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 50.
[36] DeJean, *The Age of Comfort,* 54.

> To every room there was an open and secret passage; every square had a communication with the rest, either from the upper stories by private galleries, or by subterranean passages from the lower apartments.[37]

The relative inaccessibility of places shrouded in secrecy reproduces Georgian architecture's concern with the masking of passages between private spaces, an idea that is similarly present in Beckford's *Vathek*. When the palace is attacked by the angry mob, Carathis, the caliph's mother, becomes concerned for the safety of her son, and resolves to ferry him to the impenetrable tower by means of hidden undergrounds. "Let us retire to your own apartment," she advises, "and from thence through the subterranean passage, known only to ourselves, into your tower."[38]

Other parts of interior architecture were more symbolic in nature, but no less effective. Several decorative elements, for instance, suggested transparency when applied to sub-divided structures. This, I believe, was made possible by the employment of various hybrid materials, lighter, easier to manufacture and to put in place, and also easier to remove, or to pierce. Such is is the case with wallpaper. Around the mid-century, both the English and the French discovered the benefits of this material, which allowed the beautification of structural walls for the purposes, again, of visual display.[39] But wallpaper could also draw attention to the fact that walls were multilayered structures, stratum upon stratum of material which could be removed and replaced whenever necessary. It is precisely this potential for removal that suggests transparency, inconstancy, or lack of solidity. In the famous homosexual scene in John Cleland's *Memoires of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny, the protagonist, who has just taken her lodgings in a roadside inn, hears suspicious noises in the adjoining apartment, where two men have just lodged. The passage needs to be quoted in full to see the extent to which interior arrangements of the location, along with the curiosity of the beholder, could model an instance of quasi-domestic spying:

> A spirit of curiosity far from sudden, since I do not know when I was without it, prompted me, without any particular suspicion, or other drift, to view, to see who they were, and examine their persons and behaviour. The partition of our rooms was one of those moveable ones that when taken

[37] Samuel Johnson, "The History of Rasselas Prince of Abyssinia," in *Shorter Novels of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Philip Henderson (London, New York: Everyman's Library, 1967): 4-5.
[38] Beckford, "Vathek," 214.
[39] Carolle Thibaut-Pomerantz, *Wallpaper: A History of Style and Trends* (Paris: Flamarion, 2009); Françoise Teynac, Pierre Nolot and Jean-Denis Vivien, *Wallpaper: A History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).

> down, serv'd occasionally to lay them into one, for the convenience of a large company; and now my nicest search could not shew me the shadow of a peep-hole, a circumstance which probably had not escap'd the review of the parties on the other side, whom much it stood upon not to be deceiv'd in it; but at length I observ'd a paper-patch of the same colour as the wainscot, which I took to conceal some flaw, but then it was so high, that I was oblig'd to stand on a chair to reach it, which I did as softly as possible, and with the point of a bodkin soon pierc'd it, and open'd myself espial-room sufficient: and now applying my eye close, I commanded the room perfectly, and could see my two young sparks romping, and pulling one another about, entirely to my imagination, in frolic, and innocent play.[40]

Although she has entered this public establishment for the first time in her life, Fanny knows, undoubtedly from experience, that there must be a hole in the partition wall which would allow her to see what is happening on the other side. Her knowledge of such "flaws" comes from previous encounters with vantge points for seeing through walls, and also from the secretive nature of her well-professed trade, in which acting under the supervision of a bawd was taken for granted. What is more, the illicit lovers on the other side are also aware of the risks implied by the thin division of the wall. With an eye to the peep-hole, Fanny can see, as if in a mirror, her own act of searching for cracks, replicated by the eldest of the two men. He, however, is not as insistent as Fanny, and thus fails to spot the flaw:

> But after a look of circumspection which I saw the eldest cast every way round the room, probably in too much hurry and heat not to overlook the very small opening I was posted at, especially at the height it was, whilst my eye too close to it, kept the light from shining through, and betraying it; he said something to his companion that presently chang'd the face of things.[41]

Obviously, this time the intention is not motivated by curiosity but by the need for reassurance that privacy is not being violated. Illicit, just like Fanny, the man has the same instinctive knowledge of the transparency that must govern a public place, which is far from intimate, and where the flow of people coming in and out at all times would have disturbed any attempts at intimacy. As shown by this example, it was customary in eighteenth-century inns to have a single, large inhabitable space, which could be divided by means of partition walls, usually simple wainscot or sheets of plywood, and which could easily be brought in to create smaller spaces and therefore to accommodate a greater number of customers. The division that such devices made possible was inefficient, as everybody knew. For instance the protagonists of an episode in *A Spy on*

[40] Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, 157.
[41] Ibid.

Mother Midnight (1748), a first-person epistolary novella published in two instalments plus a *Further Continuation* (1748), describes the amorous pursuits of a young gentleman lodged in a countryside inn. Two countrymen (Thomas and Hodge) and their respective wives, lodged in the inn the night before, are caught in a set scene of comedy: the gag of interchanged rooms. Thomas, "perform[ing] the Conjugal Rites" upon the woman wrongly thought to be his wife, is suddenly awakened to reality when "the Bed making a Noise against the thin Wainscoat, awaked the other Wife; who, displeas'd that she was not so well used as her Neighbour, jogg'd his suppos'd Husband out of his Nap."[42] As in the episode in *Fanny Hill,* wainscoting is here made precisely into an object that facilitates revelation of the invisible. It also proves the point that in eighteenth-century interiors dividing walls were temporary solutions to a problem that did not take privacy into account.

Interiors could also be endowed with curtains doubling the doors leading to rooms, creating short passageways that allowed secrecy by extending the space of those rooms, and with it the possibility of a hiding place. Such was the case in *Vathek*, where the caliph is said to have "heard the voice of Bababalouk calling out from between the door and the tapestry that hung before it."[43] In the very same passage Vathek remains hidden during a conversation with the embassy freshly returned from Mecca, carrying with them the besom for the handling of which utmost respect was required: "[The members of the embassy] advanced, while the caliph, without showing himself, put forth his hand from behind the tapestry that hung before the door, and demanded of them the besom."[44]

Finally, a house had many other elements of interior architecture that suggested penetrability. Interiors would be endowed, for instance, with medallions and with so-called *oeil-de-beouf* windows (round windows placed very high, used to bring more light into the room without affecting the privacy of the place), decorative elements with no clear practicality, applied either to the walls or to the ceilings, which looked like stylized holes in walls. Who would need a supplementary invitation?

From the hole in the wall to the hole in the door (aperture within aperture) the step is minimal. When visual access to an apartment was obstructed, one still had the option (if less acceptable and more risqué) of the keyhole, the crack in the wall, or the door left ajar. What all these have in common is that they are accidents of architecture. Cracks and

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[42] *A Continuation of Mr. F------'s Addentures in Petty-Coats: Being the Second Part of The Spy on Mother Midnight: Or, the Templar Metamorphos'd* (London: E. Penn, 1748), 49.
[43] Beckford, "Vathek," 221-22.
[44] Ibid., 222.

crevices obviously did not feature in an architect's plan, as they didn't feature among the range of probabilities envisaged by those unlucky enough to be spied upon. The expedients were widely used by servants and in general by all the disenfranchised and curious (women being the most important category), who happened to live, at one time or other, close enough to events to attempt to acquire knowledge about the occupants of a room (neglectful, completely absorbed in their acts, and thus made into objects of spectacle). Keyholes, as well as equivalent cracks and holes, were characterised by this important quality: they were accidental occurrences in what represented the normality of domestic architecture. They were not meant to happen, and yet they did. They did so because, as accidents/incidents, they were in a curious way necessary, constituting events that erupted into the boring regularity of daily life in order to expose its lack of regularity. They highlighted the fact that privacy itself depended on an accident, on the possibility of it never being possible – an accident of unexpected visualisation which was also the object of microscopical observation and juridical witnessing. Keyholes reveal themselves to be enabled by the elusive rhetoric of architecture, in that they belong in a context in which their intended utility is changed. The vistas of Georgian architecture, which never closed properly, not even when closure was desired (thus remaining objects of perpetual inspection), were precisely the victims of the keyhole's presence. Keyholes were the apparatus which made this opening possible, by penetrating the partitions provided for the privatisation of household occupancy.

Of keyholes and portals

If one were to imagine a literary genre for the species of keyhole narratives, one would notice that the type is not unlike other niche genres which have only recently been theorized. I have in mind Farah Mendlesohn's cogent discussion in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* of two major types associated with (mostly twentieth-century) fantasy: the portal narrative and the quest narrative. In the first case, what one is dealing with is a story in which the protagonist makes use of an artificial device (a piece of technology, a vehicle) or an

unexpected distortion of either time or space (sometimes both) in order to enter an unfamiliar territory which is then explored to the best of the narrator's capabilities.

Mendlesohn does not discuss any of the proto-fantasy texts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it is not my intention here either to delve into utopias such as Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638), Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing-World* (1668), or Jonathan Swift's *Travels into Several Nations of the World, in Four Parts, by Lemuel Gulliver* (1726). Such a discussion would exceed the scope of the present section, which is concerned with the seemingly more mundane concept of domesticity. However, I will apply several of Mendlesohn's assertions to texts that fall within the category of keyhole narratives.

I believe that eighteenth-century keyholes can very well be read as portals, insofar as they are devices capable of facilitating the passage from the *hic and nunc* of the narrator and his/her narration to the actuality of the event taking place on the other side of the door or wall. The keyhole can also be read in terms of the logic of the so-called quest narrative, and for reasons to do with the nature of the story that is being developed during the visual examination of the said event. Quests are explorations, discoveries of new territories, in which the protagonist is the only authority available to account for a reality which, to the reader, remains forever foreign and inaccessible.

"In both portal and quest fantasies," Mendlesohn says, "a character leaves her familiar surroundings and passes through a portal into an unknown place."[45] This is perhaps the most concise definition of the two sub-genres, and certainly the best starting point in a discussion of their features. The definition already raises a few important issues (familiarity, passage, portal, unknown place), which are equally applicable to keyhole narratives, where the transportation of the protagonist/viewer requires the firm ground of the familiar place on the one hand and the nebulous darkness (i.e. unfamiliarity) of the foreign space on the other.

If one takes keyhole narratives as facilitating the expansion of visible space that is programmatically shut off so as to obstruct the awareness of others, the similarity between Mendlesohn's contention and my approach becomes clearer. This is because, as I will show a little later, the viewing device makes for a very easy passage into the parallel universe that the beholder is busy viewing and, at the same time, representing. The facility of trespass is illustrative of the accessibility of the scene. Completely absorbed in

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[45] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 1.

their own actions, those who are beheld fail to notice the fact of their exposure, and consequently become easy targets. I have already mentioned, in this regard, the lack of precaution taken with regard to the proximity of servants, a common source of gossip or juridical trouble. In novels too, there is hardly any mention of such precautions, but in this milieu the reason is obviously different: the narrative focalisation is exclusively directed through the protagonist, who is also the one peeping through the keyhole. When Alovisa, the heroine of Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess*, spies on the Count through the keyhole of his bedroom, she sees him "sometimes very entirely [sic] reading a Letter, and sometimes writing, as tho' it were an Answer to it."[46] Michel Fried would immediately recognize in this an instance of absorption, in which the beholder is represented as exterior to the scene unfolding in front of her eyes: a way of seeing things 'as they happen.'

This complete lack of awareness on the part of the beheld is, no doubt, an authorial stratagem for the facilitating the reader's symbolic intrusion. The realistic pretentions of writers of the period are also an element in this equation, since narrative realism is only possible in the complete concealment of the techniques that make it possible in the first place. In this respect, the reader who is participating in the perusal of keyhole-viewed scenes becomes him/herself a voyeur, one whose purpose is to satisfy a personal desire to read that is generated by the author's narrative strategy. This becomes especially apparent in pornographic literature, where the task of completing the representation is passed directly onto the reader. Incompleteness, the key to a successful pornographic depiction, makes it necessary for the reader to take a step forward in order to engender in the narrative the full instantiation of the act. "The fantasy of porn," Susanne Kappeler argues, "is not fully depicted, it is not identical with the 'content of representation,' it is to be completed by the active subject, the viewer-hero of the representation."[47]

Before talking more about pornography,I need to say something about the other significant aspect of portal narratives: the 'other side.'

The 'other side' is always crucial, in that it is a promise to be fulfilled, and one that doesn't reveal itself unless it is activated, unless the protagonist chooses to destroy the wall that separates him/her from the unknown world. This destruction, in the shape of intrusion, is a breach of the code of trust on which domesticity is founded. Its value rests

[46] Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess, or, The Fatal Enquiry, A Novel. In Three Parts* (London: D. Browne and S. Chapman, 1725), 66.
[47] Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 59.

in its ability to move away from the place of safety and venture, like Captain Singleton, or Tom Jones, or Peregrine Pickle, into the unknown of potentiality. In fact, anything can happen on the other side; anything can present itself to the viewer as a spectacle worth spending one's time contemplating. The payoff for the adventure is not necessarily the satisfaction of having breached a code of conduct, but the act of having reached the other side, of having arrived at the fiction that 'the other side' represents. In essence, "the extent to which the mode of narrative shifts as we traverse the portal from the frame world to the other world influences the degree to which we shall settle into the fantasy world and accept it as both fantasy and as 'real.'"[48]

Fantastic literature or not, the passage from this side to the other must be marked by some kind of transformation, in order for the portal (the keyhole) to have been warranted. The model may be found in a variety of circumstances: Saul becoming Paul, Descartes becoming a self that thinks, Rousseau saying that "scrutinizing myself more carefully, I was surprised ...."[49] This is why keyholes reveal spectacular episodes, surprising events, the distinction of which relies on the fact of their being out of the prescribed normality of domesticity. I have noted that this is also the argument that validates microscopy: the promise of discovering new instantiations of the familiar world. The first English treatise on microscopy, Hooke's *Micrographia*, starts with an exercise in defamiliarization. "The point of a sharp small Needle" is an object most familiar to any readers, an object which common sense and unaided observation have already endowed with a set of qualities: smoothness, regularity, sharpness, indivisibility. The microscope, however (in essence a portal, a keyhole leading into the alien space of the microscopical world), explodes this prejudgmental approach to the humble needle. Under the inquisitive lens, the familiar object becomes alien; it "appears *broad*, *blunt,* and very *irregular*."[50] Arriving 'on the other side,' the observer finds the Unknown, but an Unknown that is unsettling precisely because it is not entirely unfamiliar. The object of scrutiny (a needle) features in the daily patois of the most elementary reader, even of those who do not read this record. A body spied upon is also a body familiar to the viewer. The keyhole or the crevice enabling the view distorts the regularity and smoothness of that body by exposing it to the eye in a state which is not its public 'normality.' This is precisely the effect of microscopy. Nobody steals in public (at least

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[48] Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy,* 2.
[49] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, tr. Charles E. Butterworth (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 44.
[50] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 2.

not in a way that anybody could see), nobody has sex in public, nobody commits frauds in public, or conspires against authority in public. All these are things done in private, where one is veiled from the restrictions of the agora, where the intrusive eye of a supervisory entity such as Mr. Spectator is obstructed. Consequently, the outstanding things revealed by peeping prove to be extra-ordinary because they rely on the wall separating the public from the private, or on the illusion of the wall. Insofar as the reader of novels is concerned, this wall is always too thick to penetrate. They will never get to 'the other side' of the keyhole/lens/portal, because they are not *in* or *of* the fiction, but outsiders to it. They need a supplementary aid in order to succeed in the adventure of revelation, and that aid is the narrator. The reader's wish to know motivates the narrator's intrusiveness. The narrator *has* to be a voyeur in order to narrate on behalf of the incapacitated reader. He/she is, like Lucy, the maid servant of Arabella in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, a narrative amanuensis. This explains Patricia Meyer Spacks' contention that *Tom Jones's* "structure, with the omniscient narrator in conspicuous control, insists on the moral value and the fictional urgency of exposure."[51] This statement is applicable not only to *Tom Jones,* and not only to what is customarily understood by an omniscient narrator. First-person narrators are also omniscient in the environment of their narration, which they control often beyond the limits of the 'I' account. On the other hand, "the moral value and the fictional urgency of exposure" features even more prominently in pornographic literature, where the moral request that the illicitness of concupiscence be revealed is nothing but a mask for the reader's *scopophilia*. So, while Spack's definition is true, it needs to be readjusted to cater for a larger category of narratives, in which the portal and quest narratives are major elements. The omniscient narrator, whatever denomination he/she may be, takes the reader on a journey. This journey is meant to eradicate the wall that separates the visible from the invisible, and the narrator facilitates the removal of that obstruction. The resulting genres can be described as follows:

> The portal fantasy is about entry, transition, and exploration, and much quest fantasy, for all we might initially assume that it is immersive (that is, fully in and of its world), adopts the structure and rhetorical strategies of the portal fantasy: it denies the taken for granted and positions both protagonist and reader as naive. Characteristically the quest fantasy protagonist goes from a mundane life, in which the fantastic, if she is aware of it, is very distant and unknown (or at least unavailable to the protagonist) to direct contact with the

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[51] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 39.

> fantastic through which she transitions, exploring the world until she or those around her are knowledgeable enough to negotiate with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm.[52]

What this definition clarifies is the affinity between narrator and reader. Both start from a naive state in relation to the discovered world. Consequently, both are prepared to accept impregnation with knowledge. This relationship holds true as long as it is needed for the reader to familiarize themselves with the unknown world, Mendlesohn argues, which confirms the reader's reliance on the novel, via the latter's narrative voice. This is the type of relation that eighteenth-century novels constructed: a one-to-one interaction between reader and narrator, in which the reader was rendered incapacitated, made to feel as if unable to acquire knowledge. From this type of relationship the reader would come out presumably enriched, which is to say, knowledgeable.

Given the promise that they will reveal the invisible, portal fantasies, like keyhole narratives, or microscopic observations for that matter, are bound to be descriptive. In order for the narrator to make full use of the reader's and protagonist's ignorance and naivety and therefore to allow the narrative to continue, the event-places encountered 'on the other side' need to be represented as if seen for the first time. They have to preserve an aura of pristine originality, of a newness that anticipates the materialization of their former potentialities. Robert Hooke's excitement at the thought that the microscope had brought to light a pregnant new world ("my faithful *Mercury*, my *Microscope*"[53]) is the excitement of someone who has discovered a new avenue for description. Similarly, narratives registered in juridical courts are founded on the necessity of descriptive statements made by witnesses: the more descriptive, the more likely the success of one's deposition. This statement may sound like a platitude. Of course a testimony needs to be descriptive, because it is a testimony *of something*. However, when it came to descriptions, eighteenth-century domestic novels encountered a serious problem, which other novel species simply don't have, and it is this problem to which I now turn.

[52] Mendlesohn, 2.
[53] Hooke, *Micrographia*, 211.

Transgressing the limits of visibleness, the keyhole operates, in domestic novels, as a visual aid to narrative material. What is striking about eighteenth-century keyhole narratives is the fact that they capture very little, if anything, of the rich architectural and decorative elements of bourgeois households. It is not that one does not always know where one is in an eighteenth-century novel, whether in a closet, salon, drawing room, or servants' quarter, because the reader is told so, but that the visualisation of these spaces stops exactly here: at the naming (or insinuation) of these functions. Karen Lipsedge has noted this aspect in Richardson. "[R]ooms in Richardson's novels," she says, "are represented as named sites, each with its own specific function and decorative style, as well as with a spatial atmosphere that is almost as tangible as the characters who occupy it." [54] This denominative demarcation is the only hint that the reader receives as to the interior in which the action takes place. Daryl Ogden points out that in *Pamela II* (the sequel to the original 1740 novel) the heroine, in her function as a wife, performs a kind of ocular observation identified "with feminine surveillance's power to dominate the household" (going as far as spying through a keyhole the sexual advances Mr. H makes to Polly), but the reader's knowledge of interior, even so, is not supplemented in any way.[55] Philippa Tristram also remarks that "sustained description, particularly where it relates to interiors, is extremely rare in Richardson's writing, although a vivid sense of location – whether in rooms, on staircases, in passages, or as forming the containment of a house – is a central and recurrent sensation for his readers."[56] One would, therefore, hope to get a glimpse of those interiors from furtive glances, that is, from keyhole episodes, in which the focus is precisely on description. However, keyhole episodes, like the novels in which they feature, do not provide the reader with any additional information about these settings, in spite of the fact that their presence is a guarantee for revelation.

[54] Karen Lipsedge, "'Enter into Thy Closet': Women, Closet Culture, and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel," ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery, *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2006), 107.

[55] Daryl Ogden, *The Language of the Eyes. Science, Sexuality, and Female Vision in English Literature and Culture, 1690-1927* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 38.

[56] Philippa Tristram, *Living Space in Fact and Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989), 229.

This is the case perhaps because in eighteenth-century novels the gaze operates in precisely the opposite direction from, say, the twentieth-century French *Roman Nouveau*, where the eye, always in motion, captures the place, its attributes, its ontology, without ever being distracted by events, which it considers too episodic to deserve mention. In the novels of Richardson and Fielding, of Cleland and Sterne, on the contrary, the gaze is there to capture events. Things, objects, pieces of furniture, atmosphere in general, are present, if ever, only coincidentally. There is no need for them, because the interior atmosphere that really matters is in the layout of the protagonist's sentiments. This is why the interior details of a house, for instance, are loosely outlined, barely sketched. In *Fanny Hill* we hear a good deal about walls used as props for bodies, or about couches that facilitate sexual postures, but almost nothing beyond these necessities of pornography. Rather, interiors seem to be concealed; one needs to deduce their presence from minute and accidental references. It is again in the accidental (as we know), in the non-premeditated, that the atmosphere of the novel of domesticity resides. The reader is doomed to remain unsatisfied in his/her curiosity about such interiors. He/she is either coincident to the atmosphere, in which case doesn't need the help of a full description (an allusion is always sufficient), or is uninterested in the place as such, but only in the event accommodated by that place, which is the unfolding of an emotion.

Significantly, the genre's later offshoot, the gothic novel, represents interior spaces that are richly endowed with objects, furniture and decorations. We get to know much about the interior design of a house that is the setting of a gothic novel. We are even allowed to know more than we would like to see. This is, of course, due to the fact that the gothic is not interested in domesticity. Its rooms are not spaces of peaceful habitation or smooth social interaction; they are not spaces from which the lowly is banished in order to make room for the aristocratic, and therefore spaces for the socially significant and the aesthetically beautiful. The spaces of the gothic novel are concerned with sorting out a problem between the individual and him- or herself (a ‘himself/herself’ turned alien, a self that is approached from the outside in spite of it being an internal, psychological hypothesis). This relationship is reflected in the way interiors are conceived. The interior of a gothic novel is a place where the dominant force is that of rejection. A keyhole would not make sense in a novel of this nature, because the keyhole is inviting; it provokes one's curiosity by promising pleasure (sexual, social, criminal), whereas the gothic promises terror, a confrontation of the self with itself.

Interior details in the gothic register are almost always obstacles to vision that can never be overcome. When they are (as happens in *The Castle of Otranto*, for instance), their revelation spoils the purpose of the entire narrative enterprise, which had been that of avoiding that revelation. Unlike domestic fiction, where the unveiling of secrets is the desired outcome of the plot structure, a narrative device that allows the action to continue, every revelation in the gothic is a failure, and usually puts an end to the entire fictional mechanism. In *Pamela*, the denouement is episodic, repetitive, and the more it is repeated the better for the reader. In *The Castle of Otranto*, by contrast, the denouement happens once and for good. No narrative is possible after the revelation; when the trick of the author-conjurer is brought to light, the magic is spoiled and the narrative exercise ends in disappointment, as Tzvetan Todorov rightly pointed out in his analysis of the fantastic, where he distinguishes the fantastic from the uncanny by inviting us to ask whether the supernatural is explained or not.[57]

It is because of the need to shun revelation that details of passages (doors, windows etc.) are never transparent in gothic novels. The doors in the catacombs of the *Castle of Otranto* are characteristically locked, and locked well. They also refuse to open in Anne Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance,* when Madame de Menon and two servants make several attempts to enter a wing of the castle where Madame had spotted a moving light. They entered the court corresponding to that wing "and ascended some steps that led to a large door, which they vainly endeavoured to open. All the different keys of the castle were applied to the lock, without effect, and they were at length compelled to quit the place, without having either satisfied their curiosity, or quieted their fears."[58] Doors like this refuse to open, no matter how hard the protagonist tries. In Horace Walpole's novella, Manfred wanders through the castle in pursuit of his grandfather's ghost, freshly descended from a painting hung on a wall. The ghost enters a particular chamber, and Manfred tries to follow: "As he would have entered the chamber, the door was clapped to with violence by an invisible hand. The prince collecting courage from this delay, would have forcibly burst open the door with his foot, but found that it resisted his utmost efforts."[59] This is how curiosity is dealt with in gothic novels: a door stays forever locked, or is simply shut in the hero's face, and the pursuit ends when nothing can open

[57] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 25.
[58] Ann Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.
[59] Horace Walpole, "The Castle of Otranto," in *Shorter Novels of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Philip Henderson (London, New York: Everyman's Library, 1967), 117.

it again. No one thinks to search for a keyhole or a crevice, the most natural thing to do in a domestic or a pornographic novel. This is precisely how *Venus in the Cloister* begins, with Sister Angelica having spied upon Sister Agnes through the keyhole and having seen her naked and masturbating. She looked through "the Crevice of the Door" [60] because the door had been locked, and because Agnes had admonished her not to enter ("I am not visible at present").[61] The most natural thing to do was to neglect the barrier to vision represented by the door and to make use of the flaw that facilitates visualization of the invisible.[62] Not so in gothic novels. There, if the search for an alternative to impeded vision is warranted by a strong curiosity (the voyeuristic drive to see and to know), that warrant seems insufficiently nurtured by an equal willingness to fulfill the wish. There are stages that need to be covered and surprises to be revealed when the time is ripe.[63] If anything, gothic novels refuse facility, which is why they thrive on procrastination. If a secret is to be revealed, the revelation has to happen the hard way: these are the rules of the genre. In novels of domesticity, on the contrary, the process of revelation requires minimal effort. In *Tom Jones*, Mrs. Bridges and Miss Deborah have numerous times spied upon Mr. Allworthy, because he was neglectful, or over-trustful, or simply unwise. Many explanations can be found for the lack of care that characterizes the victims of keyhole peeping, but the fact is that they are readily available for scrutiny, and easily made into spectacles. The doors in such novels open up all by themselves, so to speak. The threat of unveiling is never taken seriously, not even when the outcome is tragic for those whose actions, as a result, have been witnessed.

If the domestic novel relies on allusions to convey spatial representations, it is because its readership is largely made up of individuals who are refused access to the the interiors of grand architecture. When it comes to recognition, allusions to setting do not go beyond the surface. Words like 'salon,' 'parlour,' 'closet' and so on, only help the reader to isolate the function, without, however, making it possible for them to visualise the actual setting of a given space. These "implied spaces," as Cynthia Wall calls them, operate by remaining in the background of the performing protagonist, but not in a

[60] "Venus in the Cloister: Or, The Nun in her Smock, Translated from the French by a Person of Honour," in *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica*, Vol. II, ed. Kevin L. Cope (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002), 173.
[61] "Venus in the Cloister," 169.
[62] The editor of the 1725 English edition inserted a note about the use of the noun "crevice": "Some Readings have it Key-hole, but not so properly, the Nuns having no Locks to their Doors. I therefore in this Case make use of Crevice." (173)
[63] In both cases quoted above, the narratives are in their very early stages, when revelation of the secret would be impossible without destroying the attempt to materialise the story.

supporting way. Gestures, more than physical layouts, matter in such novels, where the focus of attention concerns everything that the heroine does and feels: "The careless, graceful motion of a hand, the economic signpost of a chamber, tell us all we know, and all we need to know."[64] These spaces, created mostly for theatrical actions, reveal details of their physicality only when such details become useful to the heroine in the expression of her heightened emotions. When Pamela faints for the first time, she subsequently tells us that "Mrs. Jervis gave me her smelling bottle, and had cut my laces, and sat me in a great chair."[65] Later on, in one of the numerous moments of near-fainting, Pamela says: "I rose up, and was forced to lean upon my master's elbow-chair, or I should have sunk down."[66] And again: "I went into the lobby leading to the great hall, and dropped into the first chair; for I could get no farther a good while."[67] Chairs pop into the narrative whenever Pamela needs something to support her battered self. These objects of furniture are similarly employed in *The Female Quixote,* where what is at stake is, again, the tormented self of a heroine who struggles to conquer her heightened emotions. When Arabella sees, from the window of her room, the heated discussion between Edward (the gardener whom she considers to be a secret lover) and the house steward, she has one of those typical moments of weakness: "Her Surprise at this Sight was so great," we are told, "that she had not Power to observe them any longer; but, seating herself in her Chair, she had just Spirits enough to call *Lucy* to her Assistance."[68] Just as in the examples from *Pamela,* a chair appears when a chair is needed. And so do couches, for instance when Pamela is scolded by Mrs. Jewkes for having read the letter which was not intended for her perusal. Overwhelmed by the content of the letter and the tone of reproach in Mrs. Jewkes' lecture, Pamela reacts in an emblematic way: "This is too much! Too much! I never can support this – and threw myself upon the couch, in my closet, and wept most bitterly."[69] Chairs and couches are useful because they are objects characteristic of narratives of sentiment, in which expressions of emotion must be counted in falls and faints, and where supportive paraphernalia are requisite. However, every time they are made apparent, they take one by surprise. They always seem to come from nowhere, from a curious blank spatiality in which the heroine moves as if freed from all territorial

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[64] Cynthia Sundberg Wall, *The Prose of Things. Transformations of Description in the Eighteenth Century* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 123.
[65] Richardon, *Pamela*, 64.
[66] Ibid., 107.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 92.
[69] Richardson, *Pamela*, 202.

bounds, as if in a vacuum. This novelistic feature shows that, as Jeremy Fernando has argued, "a space by definition cannot be seen; it only exists in the moment of negotiation itself, it is temporal."[70] When the novel thus presents itself as a field which needs to be negotiated, we have the figure of the reader emerging from another blankness: the blankness of his or her invisibility. Novels of domesticity and sentiment are capable of bringing readers inside their bodies and engaging them in the strategic problem of filling the gaps of information left open in the text. Readers are expected to comply happily with this rather domestic act of putting the chairs and couches in their right places, painting rooms and purchasing some furniture.

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[70] Jeremy Fernando, *Blind Reading. Literature, Otherness, and the Possibility of an Ethical* Reading (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2009), 135.

Chapter 8. Looking for the reader

Argument

To recapitulate everything I have said so far: eighteenth-century novels leave interiors invisible. When they *are* made discernible, their visualization happens only with regards to details and accidents, which are not the concern of the narrative voice, but which do concern the reader, who wants to see where they are in relation to action, character and setting. A curious reader, one who wants to find out more about the layout of a house described in one of these domestic novels, has to do more than just read: he or she has to take the narrator's word for granted. For this reason, the narrator becomes a figure who makes the reader's knowledge possible. And with the narrator, the novel itself, as a genre, becomes a type of text whose functioning depends on the author's ability to master techniques meant for the manipulation of readers. In the last chapter of the present section I will analyze four different ways in which eighteenth-century novels allow readers to penetrate their texture and become active in the unfolding of the narrative.

In order to see how this is relevant to an argument focused on keyholes and spying, however, I need to stress that the reader's implication in the novel is made possible by an aperture in the narrative, wherein some kind of accident interrupts the otherwise omniscient omnipresence of the protagonist/narrator and leaves the story without a storyteller, or when the author purposefully pierces the fabric of his/her narrative with elements that problematise reading itself.

As Lipsedge rightly observes, "on reading Richardon's novels, […] the reader does not remain an outsider, or a bystander who observes the narrative from afar. Instead, he or she glides into the 'domestic privacy' of Richardson's protagonists."[71] It is this 'gliding' that concerns my argument about readerly participation in eighteenth-century novels.

[71] Lipsedge, 107.

With *Pamela,* Richardson took the business of masking the obvious fictionality of the novel genre to an unprecedented extent. In itself, "*Pamela* as *Pamela* wrote it" would be, as it sounds in the preface to the first edition, a statement not unlike the whole of literature written before this novel. We find the remark in Behn, in Swift, in Defoe, and in the entire cohort of works that accompanied their rise. Yet with Richardson the novel is, for the first time, seriously bothered by its incongruity with facts. Richardson swears with the impertinent nonchalance of novel-writers that, apart from minor changes in the names of people and places, he did nothing to "disguise the Facts, marr the Reflections, and unnaturalize the Incidents." The moral incidence of textual rendition, which had featured prominently in *Moll Flanders*, where the narrator highlighted the necessity of altering facts wherever they threatened the ethical shine of the novel ("[the original] having been written in Language more like one still in Newgate"), is no longer present here.[72] At the end of the day, one should not forget that Richardson's target was to "paint Vice in its proper Colours, to make it deservedly Odious; and to set Virtue in its own amiable Light."[73] With Richardson, the reader ("those who had a Right to know the fair Writer's most secret Thoughts") becomes necessary in the text.[74] With small steps he brings the audience to penetrate the texture of the narrative, but these small steps make excellent foundations for what Lennox, Cleland, and Sterne will take even further:

> If the claim to historicity consists in the assertion that the story one is telling really happened, the apotheosis of the convention in Richardson's hands depends on his creation of the sense that it is really happening at this very moment. And the celebrated Richardsonian technique of 'writing to the moment' […] is closely related to the self-reflexive effect by which the narrative incorporates, as its subject matter, the process of its own production and consumption.[75]

[72] Daniel Defoe, "The Preface," in *The fortunes and misfortunes of the famous Moll Flanders*, &c. 2nd edition, corrected (London: John Brotherton, 1722), i.
[73] Richardson, *Pamela*, 31.
[74] Ibid., 26.
[75] Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740,* 5th ed. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 358.

It is precisely this technique of 'writing to the moment' that proves both new and troublesome to Richardson and his readers, and which will facilitate a highly efficient way of involving the invisible reader in the process of textual visualisation.

No discussion ever engendered by a text-conscious reader can transgress the thickness of Pamela's ubiquity in the text. The effect of her omnipresence is that everything else seems to fade into the background of the narration: even Richardson is hard to recuperate at times. The control over narrative materiality that characterizes her so well makes Pamela the ordering principle of everything in the novel. Space and time are so full of Pamela that they overtake the entire meaning of narration, which is the arrangement of events: "Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, the 28th, 29th, 30th, and 31st days of my distress."[76] Or: "Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, the 32d, 33d, and 34th days of my imprisonment."[77] One feels no urge to read beyond these headings, which indicate everything that needs to be known, which is that the heroine is there, that the feelings hinted at are her own. In such moments the ordering principle is not applied to events that have to be put together, but to the evolution of the heroine's emotions. There is nothing here apart from *her* feelings; there is nothing apart from her. Everything else is emptiness, or excess.

Because of this excessive presence, the problem of representation risks becoming an almost physiological symptom: the text would not be able to breathe, and there would be no break from this consciousness, no pause. Even when she dreams, Pamela's sleep is disturbed and she is resuscitated into this narrative consciousness without which there can be no story in *Pamela.* When she is betrayed by Mrs. Jewkes, who conspires with Mr. B for the rape that she constantly fears, Pamela's sleep is traumatically vivid, responding to thoughts that resemble very much reality (the reality in the heroine's mind):

> When I dropt asleep, I dreamed they were both coming to my bedside, with the worst designs; and I jumped out of my bed in my sleep, and frightened Mrs. Jewkes; till, waking with the terror, I told her my dream; and the wicked creature only laughed, and said, All I feared was but a dream, as well as that; and when it was over, and I was well awake, I should laugh at it as such![78]

The dream is consistent with the other reality, which the heroine experiences while awake. In this, as in other aspects, Richardson must have relied on Locke's *An Essay Upon Human Understanding,* where it is said that "[t]he dreams of sleeping men are, as I

[76] Richardson, *Pamela,* 209.
[77] Ibid., 219.
[78] Ibid., 207.

take it, all made up of the waking man's ideas, though for the most part oddly put together."[79] Such an excruciating continuity only stresses the risk for the novel that it would become an inescapable vicious circle of sleeplessness and incessant assault of perceptions: "Having nothing else to do, and I am sure I shall not sleep a wink to-night, if I was to go to bed, I will write my time away, and take up my story where I left off, on Sunday afternoon."[80] Such sentences again suggest incessant time, writing as a *perpetuum mobile*, the very impossibility of sleeping given the urgency of the narrative task.

The dream metaphor can become hard to swallow at other times, when it is imputed to Pamela. "She is in a fairy-dream," Lady Davis says, "and 'tis pity to awaken her before her dream's out."[81] Here, of course, the reference to dreaming has its own connotations, but nothing like Pamela's urge to narrate. But what Lady Davis is alluding to is another form of continuous action: reverie as misapprehension of one's true position. Dreaming, in this case too, is a form of narration: Pamela narrating herself, making herself into a persona, fictionalizing herself.

Dreams, therefore, are not separated from the 'reality' of the narrative-like parallel universes, and the novel makes this as clear as possible. As long as Pamela is endowed with any awareness at all, she will take up the entire narrative space; there is no room for reader intervention, no room for direct authorial speech, as in *Moll Flanders*, *Tom Jones* or *Tristram Shandy*.

But unlike dreams, swoons indicate moments when Pamela finally loses her control over events and, consequently, over narrative. When I say "finally" I don't mean to say that her loss of consciousness is somehow desired, as if her presence were a burden to the reader. On the contrary, Pamela's presence is a relief. Without her, there would be very little to read. When she *finally* loses control, it is because the story has reached a point of impasse. For a first-person narrative in which the chances of escaping the limelight are minimal, it is Pamela's task to record and recount that feels like a burden. Realist writers, and especially those who choose to manipulate first-person narration, are constantly faced with the challenge of being claustrophobically trapped inside the mind of a single individual. How to remain there without losing direct speech, while allowing the story to progress along the way, requires a fusion of writerly tasks. Richardson provides the essential proof that "the act of fainting is the most effective way of ceasing to know oneself, of being rendered innocent by withdrawing from the realm of

[79] *The Works of John Locke* (London: 1823), Vol. I, 93.
[80] Richardson, *Pamela*, 279.
[81] Ibid., 408.

representation altogether."[82] The tendency towards losing her consciousness is noticed several times by other characters in the novel, who even suspect her of deceit. Mr. B is the one who most often notices this trait: "She is mistress of arts, I assure you; and will mimick a fit, ten to one, in a minute."[83] Or, as he conjectures earlier in the novel: "As for Pamela, she has a lucky knack of falling into fits when she pleases."[84] To make sure that such moments do not pass unnoticed in a narrative full of inconsequential events, the moments when Pamela faints are strongly dramatized. I have already shown that pieces of furniture, such as chairs or couches, pop into the narrative at such critical moments, when the body of the heroine is said to be in need of support. This technique is used to emphasize the melodramatic intensification of feeling. But when such furniture does not appear in the narrative, one is assured of swoons becoming imminent. These moments are meant to be dramatic because they operate as indicators of preserved virtue: absented from a potentially dangerous situation, the heroine could not be said to have consciously participated in her own ravishing. Or, as Locke would have put it, "to punish Socrates waking for what sleeping Socrates thought, and waking Socrates was never conscious of, would be no more of right, than to punish one twin for what his brother twin did, whereof he knew nothing."[85] What is meant here by "sleeping Socrates" is not only Socrates falling asleep, but also other forms of loss of consciousness, such as those swoons for which *Pamela* has been made famous. For indeed, one's unconsciousness is a guarantee of one's virtue. Here is Pamela 'sleeping' and 'waking' (losing and resuming consciousness):

> I found his hand in my bosom; and when my fright let me know it, I was ready to die; and I sighed and screamed, and fainted away. And still he had his arms about my neck; and Mrs. Jervis was about my feet, and upon my coat. And all in a cold dewy sweat was I. Pamela! Pamela! said Mrs. Jervis, as she tells me since, O--h, and gave another shriek, my poor Pamela is dead for certain! And so, to be sure, I was for a time; for I knew nothing more of the matter, one fit following another, till about three hours after, as it proved to be, I found myself in bed, and Mrs. Jervis sitting upon one side, with her wrapper about her, and Rachel on the other; and no master, for the wicked wretch was gone.[86]

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[82] Christine Roulston, *Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self in Eighteenth-Century Fiction. Richardson, Rousseau, and Laclos* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 17.
[83] Richardson, *Pamela*, 222.
[84] Ibid., 97.
[85] Locke, *Works* II, 63-64.
[86] Richardson, *Pamela*, 96.

The dramatic nature of the scene resides in its heightened emotions, physical threats and the immediacy of danger. Yet what is more important is that this dramatic scene points out a gap in the process of narration. Lost in a brief moment of unconsciousness, Pamela's authority (based on uninterrupted omnipresence) is suddenly destabilized. She is no longer the only voice capable of bearing the story. And because of this she is shaken in her confidence and in the assurance that everything is in control as long as she experiences the events first hand. The certitude that had transpired through her relations so far is now turned into miserable despair: "When I think of my danger, and the freedoms he actually took, though I believe Mrs. Jervis saved me from worse, and she said she did, (though what can I think, who was in a fit, and knew nothing of the matter?) I am almost distracted."[87] It is apparent here that Pamela's confidence is destabilized: there are marks of this in her speech, in the shifts of mood and in the expressions of distrust. Moreover, it becomes noticeable that Pamela does not trust anybody with telling her own story. Unlike Charlotte Lennox's Arabella, who entrusts her confidante with the duty of recording the moments when she is not conscious, Pamela never formulates such a request, because there is nobody around to be entrusted with the task. When she does delegate an important part of her writing career (the conveyance of her letters) to John Arnold, the Bedfordshire footman, she is disappointed by his betrayal. She writes, in a letter to Mrs. Jewkes: "Even John Arnold, whom I confided in, and favoured more than any, has proven an execrable villain."[88] Seen through the context of this frustration (which will be expressed later in the novel, to be sure, but which fits very well the framework of betrayals and duplicities that Pamela fears the most), it comes as no surprise that she is not willing to trust the story of Mrs. Jervis, her otherwise trusted companion, the only one who has witnessed the short-circuited episode of her faint. As a consequence of this mistrust, readers too become doubtful of Mrs. Jervis's account. In fact, despite Pamela's repeated declarations of confidence in her companion's actions, one is uneasy about her presence, and the reason for this lies precisely in the suspicions raised by the narrator. Here, again, one can find support in Locke's *Essay*, Book II, Chapter I, where the problem of the consciousness of an other is brought up in order to deny the possibility of insight into the perceptions of such a person. "If they say," Locke argues, "that a man is always conscious to himself of thinking, I ask, how they know it. Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man's own mind. Can another man

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[87] Ibid., 97.
[88] Richardson, *Pamela*, 201.

perceive that I am conscious of any thing, when I perceive it not myself?"[89] Locke's question may be answered with the exercise proposed by Richardson, insofar as the two consciousnesses taken into consideration are the heroine's and the reader's. Yet through Richardson this answer cannot be formulated on the same field of perception that forms Locke's concern. Richardon's exercise proposes a *narrative* vacuum, in which the question is not whether another is able to know one's perceptions, but whether another is able to *imagine* those perceptions. And this is where *Pamela* can be safely situated, without discrediting Locke's argument. It is important to stress, however, that if Locke finds this kind of transfer impossible, he finds it so only when the problem of insight is taken literally. Although he does not explicitly say so, it seems as though there were room for speculation. "This is something beyond phylosophy," Locke says, by which he means to say that the possibility of one's consciousness being perceived by another is only ridiculous if one thinks of it in rational terms, that is, as *actual* transfer. But he suggests that an insight of this type would not have the same connotation if the transfer happened in imagination: if one created the perceptions of another, that is.

> [A]nd it cannot be less than revelation that discovers to another thoughts in my mind, when I can find none there myself: and they must needs have a penetrating sight, who can certainly see that I think; when I cannot perceive it myself [as in sleep], and when I declare that I do not."[90]

Richardson's play with the reader's willingness to participate in the telling of the narrative does not eschew Locke's question; it only takes it to its extreme, by imagining an impossibility as possible, that is, by imagining that the invisible can be visualised through an act of imagination (that "penetrating sight" of Locke's). This is precisely what the reader is expected to do in order to fill in those gaps in Pamela's narrative.

And this is how, when the heroine acknowledges that some things remain invisible and unknown to her, the reader enters the narrative in order to pick up a task which, through a relation of what resembles empathy, has become their own. "Pamela faints in order to remain modest and to surrender her control of the first-person narrative," Christine Roulston emphasizes.[91] If and when she surrenders, the reader takes over. The task will not be fulfilled, of course, in its entirety. As much as Pamela loses consciousness, so does the reader lose the ability to know, with absolute certainty, the nature or the reality of the abuses to which the heroine's body may or may not have been

[89] Locke, *Works* I, 95.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Roulston, *Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self*, 17.

subjected. But this is precisely the point. One *does not* need to know with full certainty: one is left free to imagine; and in imagining, one makes the story as one wants. Something similar will happen in the other three novels analysed below. The reader, incapacitated by some form of textual interruption, is left alone on the battlefield, yet is required to win that battle. Whether he/she will succeed is a matter of their own capacity. Suffice to say here that, through an obvious epistemological hole, the event of the swoon in *Pamela* lays bare a narrative from which the narrator has been suddenly estranged. In an empty moment like this, the efforts to discover invisible action become equally a reader's efforts, and thus he/she is instantiated as an active component in the process.

To return to Locke once more. By conceiving of the soul as immaterial, Locke imagined it to be separated from the body, since it (the soul) can think without the man to whom it belongs being aware of what is happening to him (the case of dreams):

> [Socrates'] soul when he sleeps, and Socrates the man, consisting of body and soul when he is waking, are two persons; since waking Socrates has no knowledge of, or concernment for, that happiness or misery of his soul which it enjoys alone by itself whilst he sleeps, without perceiving any thing of it, any more than he has for the happiness or misery of a man in the Indies, whom he knows not.[92]

The necessity arises, therefore, for an exterior entity capable of recording that which the conscious-less man has not perceived, if he wants to know what has happened while he was absent from himself. That, for Locke, is impossible to achieve. However, the problem of that necessity remains, and it haunts the novelist. In Richardson's case, this necessary entity is the reader, who operates as the only 'soul' still awake while the heroine has fallen unconscious and while the other characters' renditions cannot be trusted. Unnamed and unaddressed, the reader is the only one against whose version Pamela raises no complaints, which in itself is an encouragement for further action.

While not exactly the kind of soul that Locke envisaged in his *Essay*, an active reader can surely operate as an external entity keeping record of events invisible to the heroine (possibly even to her body, since she has no sensations after the swoon that could indicate any violence done to her body). In doing so, readers are not even being asked to do a job that is unknown to them, since the entire process of reading throughout the novel (throughout any novel for that matter) is a matter of keeping records of actions recounted by the narrator. The hole left gaping in this series of uninterrupted accounts is the sign that something has happened to the structure, that it crumbled suddenly in order

[92] Locke, *Works* I, 89.

to reveal what it has been all along, which is an exercise in motivating the reader's response.

I like to see such holes in the story (or "gaps in the 'I'," as Andrea Haslanger calls them) as instantiations of the keyhole motif.[93] They appear in order to allow the reader to peer into a zone that is inaccessible to the protagonist. Therefore, when everybody leaves the scene (protagonist, narrator, other characters), the reader stays put. It is his/her time to perform now. Even if readers cannot supplant this lack of knowledge, they can use their imagination. The task presented to them is to invent an event according to their mind, and in the process, to perform a job characteristic of keyholes, which is to refuse to stop in front of the false appearance of a barrier to vision.

The Female Quixote and the sound of the narrative voice

Charlotte Lennox's novel resembles *Pamela* in many ways, but always with a twist. It features a heroine whose virtue is at risk (although the danger comes from within). It follows that heroine from a close proximity, filtering events through her consciousness (although the narrative this time is in the third-person). It has moments when that consciousness is lost (although Arabella, unlike Pamela, resorts to tangible characters in the narrative to fix the problem for her). For these reasons, the two novels should be looked at together, or at least one after the other, as is my intention here.

It is important to note from the beginning (because this is the point of view from which I will regard the entire issue) that the reading of *The Female Quixote* is shaped by the disjunction the reader is very likely to notice between the heroine and the narrator. Unlike *Pamela*, where sympathy with the heroine was preserved in spite of occasional suspicions, in Lennox's novel one is dissuaded from so simply sympathizing with Arabella. This is due to the author's heavy didacticism, which is, among other things, the reason behind the novel's poor ending ("What had seemed a glorious feminist spark disappointingly fizzles into an unremarkable marriage that returns woman to her proper

[93] Haslanger, "What Happens When Pornography Ends in Marriage," 165.

place.")[94] Here also lies the major difference between Lennox and Cervantes, and between Arabella and her fictional forebear. Deborah Ross provides a very good parallel between the two authors with regards to the way in which they handled the ending of their novels: "When Don Quixote loses his delusion, the spell is broken, he dies, the book ends, the reader is sad. When Arabella loses hers, she is cured and can get married and live happily ever after." [95] The different treatment of the same structural motif was possible because the major emphasis in *The Female Quixote* is placed on the education of young readership, which is invited to learn how not to behave in similar circumstances, how not to forget their duties in favour of the works of fancy, which present nothing laudable and nothing worth pursuing. This is made transparent in a remark of Miss Glanvill, Arabella's London-bred cousin, who says to the heroine, as a comment upon the latter's untoward behaviour: "If you knew more of the World, Lady *Bella* […], you would not be so apt to think, that young Ladies engage themselves in troublesome Adventures: Truly the Ladies that are brought up in Town are not so ready to run away with every Man they see."[96] Objections of this kind are obviously meant to be read by "young Ladies" who may happen to be among the readers of the novel.

Due to the didactic agenda looming over the novel, the text stresses the importance of closing one's eyes to the heroine's tribulations, and of trusting instead in the dryly ironic tone of the narrative voice. It is easy to notice that almost every action of Arabella's is accompanied by a narratorial aside, which immediately debunks the content of the former's agency, in the hope that the message expressed in the penultimate chapter will be conveyed to the reader: "It is the Fault of the best Fictions, that they teach young Minds to expect strange Adventures and sudden Vicissitudes, and therefore encourage them often to trust to Chance."[97] The tendency towards chipping away at the heroine's authority (at the end of the day, the story I read is the story of *her* life) is signalled early in the text – at the moment when the reader encounters her for the very first time, and is duly informed that Arabella is a distracted young lady with a peculiar affliction:

> The perfect Retirement she lived in, afforded indeed no Opportunities of making the Conquests she desired; but she could not comprehend, how any Solitude could be obscure enough to conceal a Beauty like hers from Notice;

[94] Wendy Motooka, *The Age of Reason. Quixotism, Sentimentalism and Polotical Economy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 125.
[95] Deborah Ross, "Mirror, Mirror: The Didactic Dilemma of *The Female Quixote,*" *Studies in English Literature* 27, no. 3 (Summer, 1987): 458.
[96] Lennox, *Female Quixote*, 88.
[97] Lennox, *Female Quixote*, 379.

> and thought the Reputation of her Charms sufficient to bring a Croud of Adorers to demand her of her Father. Her Mind being wholly filled with the most extravagant Expectations, she was alarmed by every trifling Incident; and kept in continual Anxiety by a Viccisitude of Hopes, Fears, Wishes, and Disappointments.[98]

Here, Arabella is not only accused of narcissism, but thrown directly into the critical whirlpool employed to unsettle the tradition of romance literature. Thus the label of anti-novel heroine is stuck to her forehead from the very first description. One could open the novel anywhere at random and find Arabella treated in the same manner.

Book VII, Chapter XIII is the episode in which Mr. Tinsel enters Arabella's closet, after she has been alarmed by her maidservant's exclamations in the antechamber. Taken by surprise, the heroine faints. However, there is a twist to the scene.

> *Arabella* hearing this exclamation of her Woman's, eccho'd her Screams, tho' with a Voice infinitely more delicate; and seeing *Tinsel*, who, confounded to the last Degree at the Cries of both the Lady and her Woman, had got into her Chamber he knew not how, she gave herself over for lost, and fell back in her Chair in a Swoon, or something she took for a Swoon, for she was persuaded it could happen no otherwise; since all Ladies in the same Circumstances are terrify'd into a fainting Fit, and seldom recover till they are conveniently carried away, and when they awake, find themselves many Miles off in the Power of their Ravisher.[99]

The twist in the scene is that the faint is faked. Fainting is a technique of the self that allows a temporary shutdown from reality, as we have seen in *Pamela*. Under stress, Arabella *too* falls promptly into fits. Her swoons, like her entire behaviour, are fashioned, and do not occur because of a physical shutdown. They are faints à la romance: actions with a precedent. But the same could be said about Pamela. Fielding, and with him the entire anti-Pamelist movement of the mid-century, would agree that virtue stands at serious risk when one's swoons happen as if to an order. A scene in *Shamela* illustrates precisely this problem:

> Mrs. *Jervis* and I are just in Bed, and the Door unlocked; if my Master should come Odsbobs! I hear him just coming in at the Door. You see I write in the present Tense, as Parson *Williams* says. Well, he is in Bed between us, we both shamming a Sleep, he steals his Hand into my Bosom, which I, as if in my Sleep, press close to me with mine, and then pretend to awake. I no sooner see him, but I scream out to Mrs. *Jervis*, she feigns likewise but just to come to herself; we both begin, she to becall, and I to bescratch very liberally. After having made a pretty free Use of my Fingers,

[98] Ibid., 7-8.
[99] Lennox, *Female Quixote*, 300.

without any great Regard to the Parts I attack'd, I counterfeit a Swoon. Mrs. *Jervis* then cries out, O, Sir, what have you done, you have murthered poor *Pamela*: she is gone, she is gone.

O what a Difficulty it is to keep one's Countenance, when a violent Laugh desires to burst forth."[100]

Pretence is exaggerated in order to denigrate a heroine whose virtue (in the Richardsonian original) seemed too perfect to be true. But Fielding's words are not meant to be taken seriously. After all this is a parody. So let us abandon him here (with a laugh) and concentrate on Charlotte Lennox. Fielding, however, doesn't let me go without acknowledging his contribution, because I can see how *The Female Quixote* continues to cut at the root of romances via their heroines, thus following and perhaps improving the model contrived by Fielding. In *The Female Quixote,* the dilemma that accompanies readers with regards to accepting the truthfulness of the heroine's swoons is demolished. In its stead the author asserts the absolute certitude that she is wrong in whatever she does, and therefore in her tendency to counterfeit loss of consciousness. Richardson was not so cruel with his protagonist. In *Pamela*, loss of consciousness was signalled as complete interruption of awareness of the heroine's surroundings, and even though some of the characters also accuse her of having fabricated those fits, the reader never receives a full proof of that assumption. This is why readers of *Pamela* inhabit a dilemma, while those of *The Female Quixote* do not. In Lennox's novel, fainting is a fictional device conspicuously thrown into the narrative in order to strengthen the impression of the heroine's unreliability. And this is, of course, an effect of the narrator's workings.

The problem I perceive, as a reader of *The Female Quixote,* is not that the heroine is deluded by romances, but that the narrator tells me so. Arabella's actions follow a pattern of syllogistic logic, which is consistent throughout (up until the moment when another entity superior, as well as invisible, to her – the *deus-ex-machina* divine of Book IX, Chapter XI – decides otherwise, and Arabella is 'reformed'). All the conclusions she draws from the actions she is a witness to are perfectly valid conclusions. There is nothing wrong there. If there *is* something wrong with regards to the causality of Arabella's reflections it is the fact that the premises on which the conclusions are based are false. When she sees, *from a distance* (and this must be stressed, because distance relativizes perceptions), a young man engaged in a conversation with the castle's steward, she concludes that he is a person of quality: some "insolent Lover, who was come to steal

[100] Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews,* 330.

her away."[101] The picture she constructs of this young man is perfectly valid, from two perspectives. Firstly, he is young and not unattractive, has good manners, and appears to be negotiating something with a seemingly untrustworthy servant (all of which could very well be the attributes of a young man of quality). Secondly, the fictional logic of romance provides Arabella with all the necessary arguments to see this young man as a person of quality: all I need to do is give the same attributes a patina of fantasy. Which is precisely what Arabella does. The problem arises from the fact that I already know that this young man is no person of quality, but a labourer employed to work in the garden and who had already come into conflict with the head gardener for some carp he had stolen from the castle's pond. And because of this foreknowledge, I laugh at Arabella's preposterous representation. But without the foreknowledge made possible by the intervention of the narrative voice, I, the reader, would have been placed in a context of literary fantasy, and would have read the text accordingly, after having, like all good readers, suspended my disbelief. Or, conversely, I would have understood the fact that distance and the trap of visual appearances had played a trick on the protagonist and made her take that man for what he was not. In which case I would read the text differently, but still not in the logic imposed on me by the narrator.

Arabella's deductions are, therefore, logical in themselves. What changes them is the intervention of this figure external to her story, which alters the reader's perception and which, at the end of the novel, will alter the heroine as well. In the episodes of the robbers taken for cavaliers, the issue is probably easier to observe, because the narrative voice is even quicker than usual in making the identity of the mistaken individuals clear to anyone willing to know. Arabella and her equipage of servants, accompanied by Mr. Glanvill and Sir Charles Glanvill, his father, are on their way to Bath, where they are planning to spend a few months. "The First Day's Journey," the narrator says, "passed off, without any Accident worthy relating; but, towards the Close of the Second, they were alarmed by the Appearance of three Highwaymen, well mounted, at a small Distance." There is no doubt, from the description, that the group is about to meet a bunch of outlaws intent on robbing them. Nevertheless, Arabella believes they are cavaliers, and is disappointed when she is informed to the contrary. What is crucial in this scene is that knowledge of the strangers' true identity is hidden from the heroine: "One of the Servants, who had first spied them, immediately rode up to the Coach; and, for fear of alarming the Ladies, whispered Mr. *Glanville* in the Ear." It is Mr. Glanvill who has

[101] Lennox, *Female Quixote*, 92.

the benefit of knowing the identity of those robbers (and the reader along with him), but not Arabella, who, one should not forget, has been raised in isolation, away from any other human contact apart from her father and her servants, and thus not likely to be able to recognize the traces of any other type of person. One must add to this the host of appearances that inform her otherwise than the truth imparted by the omniscient narrator:

> *Arabella,* being in a strange Consternation at all this, put her Head out of the Coach, to see what was the Matter; and, observing Three or Four Men of a genteel Appearance, on Horseback, who seemed to halt, and gaze on them, without offering to advance;
> Sir, said she to her Uncle, are they yonder Knights whom you suppose will attack us?[102]

The result is utter confusion. It should come as no surprise that Arabella must reach a conclusion very far from reality. However, the scene is added to the novel in the hope of highlighting her propensity towards delusions, and to make complete her character as romance reader. This is why her readiness to associate the strangers with knights is emphasized, when she could have associated them with any other, more 'real,' human types.

The prize of the game in which the heroine in engaged is establishment of correct knowledge. And, surprisingly, Arabella seems to be aware of the contest between conflicting representations that motivates the game. When, at the end of this brief adventure, she shows astonishment ("Were these Cavaliers, who appeared to be in so handsome a Garb, that I took them for Persons of prime Quality, were they Robbers? I have been strangely mistaken, it seems"), she is not at all convinced that things were exactly as they had been presented to her ("However, I apprehend there is no Certainty, that your Suspicions are true; and it may still be as I say, that they either came to rescue or carry us away").[103] The point made here is one that any empirical demonstration could claim: two interpretations of the same event may very well be different, given the different circumstances in which the presuppositions have been made, but at the same time they can be equally valid. Or, to put it in the words of Wendy Motooka, "with the absence of certainty, [Arabella's] interpretation has as strong a truth claim as everyone

[102] Ibid., 257.
[103] Ibid., 259.

else's, for unless certainty can be established, all interpretations are supported only by probability."[104]

It seems that, once again, without the narrator's indications, the reader would not be bothered by the incongruity between premise and reality. One would follow Arabella in her romantic adventures and take those adventures for granted. However, the intervention of the narrative voice, with its well-modulated inflexions, dislocates the foundation of such enterprise by making apparent something that would otherwise remain invisible: the heroine's 'madness.' I place the word between inverted commas because I believe that Arabella's affliction of the mind is an induced madness, and one induced not in her, but in me, the reader, who can only interpret her actions as 'mad' because I am constantly told so. Lennox does not put much effort into hiding her intention of influencing the reader this way. I only need to see the title of Book I, Chapter IX ("In which a Lover is severely punished for Faults which the Reader never would have discovered, if he had not been told"), which sets the record straight on any misreadings caused by the heroine's behaviour.[105]

What the narrator knows (and I too, as a reader, know because I have invested my reading expectations in this voice from beyond the events but deeply rooted in the text), Arabella doesn't know. And thus, I, the reader, am just as Quixotic as she, the female Quixote, is presented to me, since I am unhesitatingly willing to give in all my authority, possibly all my dignity, to the text of a book (the narrator being, of course, a creature made out of text) which I read most literally.

In writing *The Female Quixote*, Lennox surely exaggerated everything: her depictions of the heroine, her didactic intentions, and her treatments of fiction as bad. But, as Langbauer, and after her Ross, both argue, this exercise in exaggeration tends to reveal the fact that the problem of fiction constitutes the novel as well.

Bakhtin situated the novel in a very unstable territory, in which the genre constantly redefines itself against itself, as well as against other competing species. "The novel," he argued, "parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating and re-accentuating

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[104] Motooka, *The Age of Reason*, 131.

[105] Lennox, *Female Quixote,* 30. In fact, many other chapter titles bare such signs of a reader-directed narrative, and thus, once again, Lennox seems to have embraced a technique signed by Henry Fielding, who employs it massively in his novels.

them."[106] This is the most intimate condition of the novel: it is condemned never to cease laying out its boundaries. It is with the Bakhtinian definition in mind that one needs to approach *The Female Quixote*, its inconstancies and its incongruities, its good plot management and its poor ending. *The Female Quixote* shows the ability of novelistic discourse not only to challenge itself but also to contaminate the broader literary environment in which it exists. "In an era when the novel reigns supreme," Bakhtin says, "almost all the remaining genres are to a greater or lesser extent 'novelized'."[107]

Of course, at the time when Lennox was writing her works the affirmation of the novel as against romance was not an innovation in genre theory. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth century diverse writers had already conducted their guerrilla wars against the staleness of romance and in general against all genres that exaggerated fiction for fiction's sake. Congreve, in the introduction to his romance-cum-novel *Incognita* (1692)*,* wrote that "Romances give more of Wonder, Novels more Delight."[108] Little over a decade later, Mary Delarivier Manley also expressed great satisfaction at the thought that "Little Histories" of the kind she was writing (essentially *romans à clef*) had "taken place of *Romances,* whose Prodigious Number of Volumes were sufficient to tire and satiate such whose Heads were most fill'd with those Notions."[109] The genre of romance was blamed for having bought too much into the promise of fiction, and also for having been pernicious to the minds of young readers. Defoe performed a similar thing in his preface to *Robinson Crusoe*, where he praised himself for the qualities that set his text apart from the norm: "The Story is told with Modesty, with Seriousness, and with a religious Application of Events to the Uses to which wise Men always apply them (*viz*) to the Instruction of others by this Example."[110]

The history of the romance-novel dichotomy is, therefore, much longer than the century in which *The Female Quixote* was written. As a consequence, it would be unwise to say that the manifestations of antipathy between the two (more of the novel towards romances than *vice versa*) were signs of some new reshuffling of genres. In fact, as

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106 M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. Michael Holquist, tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), 5.
107 Bakhtin, Ibid.
108 William Congreve, "Introduction" in *Incognita: Or, Love and Duty Reconcil'd. A Novel* (London: Peter Buck, 1692), para 1.
109 Mary Delarivier Manley, "To the Reader" in *The Secret History, of Queen Zarah, and the Zarazians; Being a Looking-glass for ---- --------- In the Kingdom of Albigion* (London: 1705), sig. A2.
110 Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (London: 1719) sig. A2-A2v.

Northrope Frye pointed out, the romance has a unique ("proletarian," he calls it) ability to regenerate, since "no matter how great a change may take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on."[111]

What happened in the mid-eighteenth century was a reaffirmation of the novel's equal propensity towards renewing itself and its immediate surroundings, an aspect in which it resembles the romance too well. Under the influence of Richardson's and Fielding's mutual animosity, motivated by their equivalent efforts to impose their own 'new way of writing,' many authors of prose fiction took up the task of reaffirming the novel by contrasting it with almost everything written before. Romance, one of the most visible targets, was repeatedly brought to the fore in order to be tested against the vigorous reassessments aimed at secularizing and de-exoticising the domain proper to literature. Lennox's novel makes direct reference to Richardson and Johnson in the famous penultimate chapter of Arabella's conversion. The strongly opinionated divine who cures Arabella from her schizoid love for romances, says:

> An admirable Writer of our own Time, has found a way to convey the most solid Instructions, the noblest Sentiments, and the most exalted Piety, in the pleasing Dress of a Novel, and, to use the Words of the greatest Genius in the present Age, 'Has taught the Passions to move at the Command of Virtue.'[112]

The "Writer" is, obviously, Samuel Richardson, and the "Genius" is Samuel Johnson, the author of *The Tatler,* where the quoted words had been published. A particular contention of Richardson's that is perfectly illustrative of this highly didacticist tendency is praised by the divine in relation to the new species of writing. "I am endeavouring to write a Story," Richardson wrote in one of his letters, "which shall catch young and airy Minds, and when Passions run high in them, to shew how they may be directed to laudable Meanings and Purposes, in order to decry Novels and Romances, as have a Tendency to inflame and corrupt."[113] The use of "novel" in the same category as "romance" is only an indication of the instability of terminology employed at the time in relation to genres. The novel as known to us had not been well defined at this stage, and not yet separated from other forms of fictional accounts, massively employed throughout the eighteenth

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[111] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 186.
[112] Lennox, *Female Quixote,* 377.
[113] Samuel Richardson, *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson,* ed. John Caroll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964): 46-47. Quoted in Mary Patricia Martin, "'High and Noble Adventures': Reading the Novel in *The Female Quixote,*" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 31, no. 1 (Autumn, 1997): 47.

century.[114] Richardson places both denominations under the same umbrella of what might be called "excessive fiction": exaggerations of the fictional mode, so as to achieve an effect of complete and noticeable separation from reality. His contention here addresses primarily the didactic feature of the new writing (his own *Pamela* and *Clarissa* were, in fact, written with the possibility in mind that they might be employed as models of comportment). But it is also well-known that Richardson lobbied for a change in writing techniques, by devising the so-called 'writing to the moment technique,' concerned with immediacy, realism, and orality.

With such observations in mind, it is not hard to agree with Mary Patricia Martin, who stresses that, in reality, the cure administered by the divine to Arabella at the end of the novel is not a medical treatment, but a "lesson in genre": "[T]hough Arabella must give up her romances," Martin says, "it is not real life that she must learn to love, but novels."[115] Martin's larger argument is that, with *The Female Quixote,* Lennox situated herself in the two major battles fought on the fields of literature: the one for the instauration of the novel as the dominant genre, and the other for the emergence of the female writer (genre and gender addressed together). In her penultimate chapter, when she finally gives in to the persuasive power of the Johnsonian divine, she is told straightforwardly what the author has meant readers to know from the beginning:

> A long Life may be passed without a single Occurrence that can cause much Surprise, or produce any unexpected Consequence of great Importance; the Order of the World is so established, that all human affairs proceed in a regular Method, and very little Opportunity is left for Sallies or Hazards, for Assault or Rescue.[116]

If this is not the way life that must be represented, then which is the true way? Surely, that of novels, where what is stressed is the ordinariness of the protagonist's condition, the recognisibility of their social milieu, and in general a good imitation of everything. "The only Excellence of Falshood," the divine emphasizes, "is its resemblance to Truth."[117]

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[114] What I mean by the word 'novel' here is that major genre of the eighteenth century (with its multiple subdivisions) which stood against other generic forms, such as romance, autobiography, or travel writing. I have also used the term "novel" to designate mostly domestic novels (hence my preference for mid-century productions), and consequently I have pointed out differences between such domestic, or sentimental, novels and the later offshoots of the genre, as in the gothic species.
[115] Martin, "High and Noble Adventures," 45.
[116] Ibid., 379.
[117] Lennox, *Female Quixote*, 378.

But this "Falshood" requires its own rules and conventions in order to survive. When Lucy, Arabella's servant, says with her admirable simplicity, "I can't make a History of nothing," I, the reader, know too well that what Arabella can offer in terms of narrative is a zero sum: she can stay as the heroine of the novel insofar as she avoids being defined by what is acceptable.[118] Her rebellion is the engine of the novel, its life energy. As Christine Roulston has argued, "If what the narrative [of *The Female Quixote*] uncovers is the ostensible absurdity of romance, what romance reveals is that there can be no narrative without it."[119] Indeed, placed outside the logic of romantic plot, the non-events witnessed by the maidservant amount to nothing. They are, in Roulston's words, "histories of nothing." To become *something*, these events need to be seen in a non-romantic way. And the novel genre is a handy alternative.

It could be said, in conclusion, that in *The Female Quixote* the heroine's difficulties result from her having placed herself in the wrong genre. So much so, that the reader is confused in their attempts to correctly read her character and her actions. "A reader seeking wisdom from *The Female Quixote,*" Deborah Ross observes, "would often be unsure whether to view Arabella as a model or as a warning,"[120] unsure indeed, if the reader is alone in the enterprise. But I am fortunate not to be so, and to have a narrator who can assure me that I am not deluded, unlike the heroine.

***Fanny Hill,* pornography, and descriptive insufficiency**

Having left *Pamela* hanging from the point of description, and *The Female Quixote* from the point of narrative voice, it is now time to look at a work whose main concern is language and the ways in which words can generate active readers. John Cleland's *Memories of a Woman of Pleasure* was written four years before the novel of Charlotte Lennox. However, I have chosen to break with straight chronology in order to follow a

[118] Ibid., 305.
[119] Christine Roulston, "Histories of Nothing: Romance and Femininity in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*," *Women's Writing* 2, no. 1 (1995): 27.
[120] Ross, 466.

different kind of pattern. My logic is based on the idea that a certain kind of progression can be seen in the fits and starts that characterize eighteenth-century novels, of which the four novels I have chosen for closer analysis are the most illustrative. I see this progression not in terms of a timeline, but rather as a thematic impulse (which in the case of these four novels may be regarded as manifestations, in gradual complexity, of various aspects of domesticity: subjection, liberation through reading, domesticated sexuality, and uninhibited sentimentality) as well as a generic stratification (from domestic history, to romance, to pornography, to sentimental novel).

Genre was, as I have shown, an important concern of mid-century writers, and *Fanny Hill* is no exception to the rule. To prove the point, I surround this novel with references to other works, which give a feel for what it must have been like for a seventeenth or eighteenth-century text to be called pornographic.

The genre is arguably a problematic one. By and large, the early-modern pornographic novel presented to readers a problem of its own descriptive limitation, derived from the gap between the vital need for explicitness and the moral self-restraint (motivated by policing practices) to which authors were subjected or to which they subjected themselves. The tension between these two tendencies could be well understood from the fact that pornography, as Felicity Nussbaum has indicated, throughout its early-modern history "flaunted the public sexuality that was supposed to be hidden from the bourgeois mother and the chaste maiden."[121] To a class whose emergence and early evolution depended largely on decency and etiquette, showing sexuality seems to have been a matter of liberation, especially because, if we look at it from a counter-patriarchal, feminist point of view such as Nussbaum's, we might agree that "demands to hide prostitution," the most convenient matter of pornographic literature, "helped obscure men's role in its perpetuation."[122]

Devising a counter-movement to the emancipation of the body's right to be displayed (a twentieth-century concept, but one with certain roots in the Enlightenment), so-called pornographic literature was condemned to wage this war in guerrilla fashion, by harassing the establishment rather than taking a frontal position, so to speak, against it. In one of its instantiations, this war took the form of a war of words over the disputed claim that language belongs in a territory where its functioning must be regulated.

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[121] Felicity A. Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones. Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 99.
[122] Ibid.

Some authors chose to turn a blind eye to the demand to circumvent bawdy matters and insalubrious words. Such is the case of *The School of Venus,* a translation from a very popular seventeenth-century French original, where straightforwardness is the most prominent factor, and where things are told without any veils. To give but one example:

> You may see there are more ways then one to put a Prick into a Cunt, sometimes my Husband gets upon me, sometimes I get upon him, sometimes we do it sideways, sometimes keeling, sometimes crossways, sometimes backwards, as if I were to take a Glister, sometimes Wheelbarrow, with one leg upon his shoulders, sometimes we do it on our feet, sometimes upon a stool, and when he is in Hast he throws me upon a Form, Chair or Foot, and fucks me lustily, so these ways afford several and variety of pleasures, his Prick entering my Cunt more or less, and in a different manner, according to the posture we Fuck in, in the day times he often makes me stoop down with my head almost between my Legs, throwing my Coats backwards over my Head, he considers me in that posture, and having secured the Door that we are not surprised, and makes a sign with his Finger that I stir not from that posture, then he runs at me with a standing Prick, and Fucks me briskly, and hath often protested to me he takes more pleasure this way that any other.[123]

One needs to take a deep breath after having read a one-sentence paragraph of this length. There is a feeling in the rapid unfolding of the sexual events of this prolonged copulation scene that the author has just found the hidden channel through which bawdy details could be displayed, and wants to lose no opportunity to say everything, quickly but exhaustively. The effort of imagination readers are meant to invest in this passage is reduced, it may be, to the somewhat mechanical transfer from page to mind. Otherwise, little remains unsaid about the "ways to put a Prick into a Cunt," a phrase in itself straightforward and in no special need for elaboration. The reader's real effort is a physical one: the text depends greatly on eye movements, on lung capacity, perhaps on the posture of the reading body and its ability to sustain that posture for the length of the entire book. As Joseph Pappa argues, "in narratives pertaining to love and courtship, the act of reading transfuses the passions from the text into the reading body."[124] Pappa's central argument in his book is that he who peruses an erotic or pornographic text reacts physically, not only mentally, to the text on the page.

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[123] "The School of Venus," in *When Flesh Becomes Word. An Anthology of Early Eighteenth-Century Libertine Literature*, ed. Bradford K. Mudge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19.

[124] Joseph Pappa, *Carnal Reading. Early Modern Language and Bodies* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 43.

> What makes early modern language usage so much different from today is the role the earlier period accorded to the body in interpretation. How a person felt from reading a text was inextricably connected to how a reader understood a text. 'Touching' language was both metaphorical and literal: metaphorical in the ways authors and scholars posited the force of language; literal in the ways language stimulated a passion, or an emotion with a pulse.[125]

Considering the incredible speed at which the scenes from *The School of Venus* unfolds, the book must have been meant to be read at one go, thus resolving two major problems: on the one hand satiating the reader with details unavailable in other sources, and on the other hand addressing the issue of quick progression towards the end, which is most important in illicit actions where the greatest urgency comes from the fear of being caught. Hence there are no emotional paroxysms in *The School of Venus*: no fainting, no cries for help, and no exaggerations of sensations. Psychological progression is completely lacking. This, as well as the frank employment of unadulterated words, is a manifestation of the fact that the work is not a piece of fiction. The modes of narration and description in *The School of Venus* are very flexible, since what one has here is rather an instruction manual, a very explicit one, indeed, but one that doesn't regard sexuality as bawdy. Sex scenes in this novel are graphic because their aim is to provide instruction, through anatomical exactness, in the physiological and psychological processes at work while one has sex. From this perspective I would not include *The School of Venus* in the group of pornographic texts, in spite of its conspicuousness and its blatant disregard for decorum.

Yet I do not want to suggest that the book is not concerned with language. On the contrary, the text touches on issues to do with the correct translation of slang for various denominations of sexual organs, intercourse, and amorous positions. It is, in other words, concerned with synonymy, and through it, with the larger issue of linguistic decorum. "There are other words which sound better," the narrator assures us, "and are often used before Company, instead of Swiving and Fucking, which is too gross and downright Bawdy, fit only to be used among dissolute Persons; to avoid scandal, men modestly say, I kissed her, made much of her, received a favour from her, or the like."[126] The same decorum, however, is reformulated later on, when the topic of discussion changes to men's tendency to use dirty words during copulation. Here, one finds a brief but apt digression on the handling of linguistic material for the denomination of familiar body

[125] Pappa, 111-12.
[126] Ibid., 35.

parts, in which there is nothing to indicate restraint. As in the rest of the text, the focus is on open sincerity: the nakedness of bodies calling for a naked use of language. When the discussion arrives at the observation that women blush at the sound of the word "cunt," the commentary hits back with hint of revenge: "methinks indeed they do ill, that make such a pather, to describe a Monysyllable by new words and longer ways then [sic] is necessary, as to call a Man's Instrument according to it's [sic] name, a Prick, is it not better than Tarsander, a Mans-Yard, Man *Thomas*, and such like tedious demonstrations, neither proper nor concise enough in such short sports." There is a pragmatics of language use operating here, dependent on context, which indicates straightforwardness as a necessary method in attaining reliability and naturalness. But in advocating such lack of cunning in the use of words, *The School of Venus* fails to enrol itself in the literary category of pornography. Truly pornographic texts are those which awaken the voyeur in readers, through avenues left open for readers to contribute with their own imagination. As mentioned by Susanne Kappeler earlier, the business of representation must be "completed by the active subject." This is where all mechanisms of titillation and arousal are directed, and in which the success of pornography lies.

Truly pornographic books hide and expose at the same time: the former more often than the latter. They signify through gaps purposefully elbowed into the descriptive process in order to highlight the necessity of a reader endowed with a good imagination of their own. What we find in such situations (and this is where one can see a connection between domestic novels as outlined in the preceding chapters and pornography) is not description, but a manipulation of allusions. The power of allusion rests in the capacity of the reader to recognize, from personal experience or from previous readings, those clues that permit the reconstruction of the picture in terms closest to authorial intent. If there is a descriptive deficiency in pornography, derived from the block on straightforwardness, this deficiency is usually dispelled by calling upon the reader's imagination to fill the gap. In the second letter of the already quoted *A Spy On Mother Midnight*, the gap imposed by unspoken moral enunciations is transformed into a species of vicarious exploration precisely by means of encouraging the reader (of the letter and of the novella) to take over the task which the narrator cannot perform. The first letter had finished in suspense, at the moment when the reader would have expected the depiction of a sexual act. "I had more to add," the narrator goes, "but as my Letter is extended to so enormous a Length, and as I have carried you thro' this last Scene, which is better imagin'd than describ'd, I shall refer the further Particulars of this Amour 'till another

Opportunity offers."[127] Two words pop out already: imagination and description. They are dealt with as if they were mutually objectionable. Description, the task of the speaking narrator, appears deficient. It cannot be performed under the duress of the ethical obligations born by the text, which requires that unsavoury details be concealed. Imagination, a quality belonging to the reader, is freed from such restrictions, and can, therefore, work at will. This way, the narrative is able to move on instead of stopping impotently, as it were, before the gap.

With the promise of resumption in mind, the narrator has another go in the beginning of the second letter, hoping to be less uneasy about the recounting of the events: "To begin then where I left off: The last Scene was in Bed with my charming Prude, where I only drew the Curtain over those Joys which no Words can amply express, but which one of your amorous Complexion can [...] imagine."[128] The text stresses the importance of what it doesn't say by drawing the attention of the reader to the moral embarrassment that had caused the descriptive hiccup at the end of the previous letter. What follows, however, is far from revelatory: a list of customary emotions and sensations ("Bliss," "chiding, sighing," "fond Caresses"), which the reader is invited to imagine. Thus the promised description turns out to be just a game of vocabulary, and so the task of representation falls onto the shoulders of the reader, who may construct the scene as he/she likes. Meanwhile, the narrator shows his sexual virtuosity when it is no longer needed, that is, *post coitum*:

> [S]uppose this [i.e. all the signs of love-making summarized in the list], and a thousand nameless Somethings that add Significance to the important Business of Love, and at last, when you are wearied with imagining all, you may, if you will, fancy your Friend drown'd in soft Slumbers in her Snowy Bosom, encircled with her Ivory Limbs, that twine voluntarily round his now lifeless Members; and after you have given me a few Hours Repose, and bring me fresh and vigorous to the Morning Charge; all this I fancy will be no hard Matter for you to suppose, without my telling you any thing of the Matter."[129]

The business of narrative transmission from novel to reader is made possible by the explicitly mentioned affinity between the person who narrates and the person who reads, an issue greatly facilitated by the epistolary form, which identifies a fictional but specific addressee (the friend generically named Jack). But then this rather emphasizes that

[127] *A Spy on Mother Midnight: Or, The Templar Metamorphos'd* (London: E. Penn, 1748), 35.
[128] *A Continuation of Mr. F------'s Addentures in Petty-Coats*, 5-6.
[129] Ibid., 6.

representation is not the exclusive occupation of the person in the story: it can be shared with the person outside it as well. This is why titillation by postponing or omitting crucial elements of sexual import in a text which is in essence pornographic works to consolidate the position of the reader as generator of meaning.

Omission is what Henry Fielding does best. To quote Richard Gooding, "what Fielding excludes is as significant as what he admits."[130] Or, to be more explicit about his method of dealing with text and reader via omission, one could note Stephen Dobranski's assertion in relation to *Tom Jones*: "Fielding tries to use all [...] sites of omission to stage his authority over the text, but he simultaneously accepts that readers can go beyond his intentions and determine how – or even whether – such gaps are filled."[131] In *The Female Husband*, a short criminal biography intent on exploring lesbianism, Fielding marks those omissions with the exactness of a legally authorized censor, by cutting the narrative short whenever he finds it too risqué. For example: "Their conversation, therefore, soon became in the highest manner criminal, and transactions not fit to be mention'd past between them." And also: "upon which a discourse arose between the two ladies, not proper to be repeated." As well as: "she made some remarks not so proper to be here inserted."[132] All these instances are remarkable by the interruption of narration, but an interruption not without implanted clues. That which should not be mentioned is precisely what readers are invited to explore on their own. As in his novels, where readers are addressed in person and their reading directed through narratorial asides, here as well the perusal of the text becomes an act of agency on the reader's part: an act of co-authored representation. In this respect, Fielding leaves a lot more to the reader's imagination than Cleland, who writes precise descriptions coated in an imprecise language. As Patricia Meyer Spacks formulates it, *Fanny Hill* is "pornographic in content, though not in language."[133] In Cleland, there is little doubt as to what happens between two lovers. When the protagonist plainly describes "carrying his hand to my breasts, I prest it tenderly to them," sexual intercourse is the only possibility. As it is when she introduces, in no affected words, another scene: "As soon as he was in bed, he threw off the bed-cloathes, which suffer'd him to force

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[130] Richard Gooding, "*Pamela*, *Shamela,* and the Politics of the *Pamela* Vogue," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7, no. 2 (1995): 127.
[131] Stephen B. Dobranski, "What Fielding Doesn't Say in *Tom Jones,*" *Modern Philology* 107, no. 4 (May 1010): 636.
[132] 290, 296, 310.
[133] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 86.

from my hold, and I now lay as expos'd as he could wish, not only to his attacks, but his visitation of the sheets."[134] Such overtures indicate exactly what is about to be narrated in even more detail. So, from this point of view, Cleland is, indeed, much more explicit than Fielding. On the other hand he is also more restrained than the French writer Michel Millot, to whom *The School of Venus* is generally attributed.[135] The restraint I am mentioning here is a very curious one. On the one hand, it holds back certain aspects (it refrains from pronouncing those "Monysyllables" representing the 'true' names of sexual organs), but on the other hand it spreads others out (it expands the endless combinatorial possibilities of generating names for the same organs, and thus makes those "Monysyllables" explode into luxuriant synonymy).

This is precisely the job of pornography, which manages the problem of descriptive deficiency by employing substitutes: synonymies, polysemies, metaphors, similes. In *A Spy on Mother Midnight,* the characters are said to have spent some pleasurable time when, after a hearty breakfast, they "carry'd on a Conversation highly season'd with double Entendre."[136] The escape route of imprisoned language is the employment of double meanings. And so, the penis is called a plumb line, the vagina is likened to a well.

John Cleland is an expert in dealing with this type of difficulty, doubled by the threat of redundancy ("there is no escaping a repetition of near the same images, the same figures, the same expressions"), which he transforms into a veritable art of polysemy.[137] Indeed, he bases the entire sexual enterprise of his narration on the aesthetic possibility of pretending not to see that there is lewdness in the novel. *Fanny Hill* has been seen, for this reason, as "a monument to Cleland's resolve to write an erotic work without using dirty words."[138] If we were to believe Boswell, who mentions a conversation with Cleland on April 13, 1779 (the only conversation between the two ever recorded by Boswell), the author of *Fanny Hill* had set off to write the novel in his youth with the ambition "to show Hon. Charles Carmichael that one could write so freely about a woman of the town without resorting to the coarseness of *L'École des filles*, which had quite plain words."[139]

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[134] Cleland, *Fanny Hill,* 72, 133.
[135] Bradford K. Mudge, "A note on the texts," in *When Flesh Becomes Word. An Anthology of Early Eighteenth-Century Libertine Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xvi.
[136] *A Spy on Mother Midnight*, 11.
[137] Cleland, *Fanny Hill,* 91.
[138] Carolyn D. Williams, "'The Way to Things by Words': John Cleland, the Name of the Father, and Speculative Etymology," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 28 (1998), 273.
[139] James Boswell, *Laird of Auchinleck, 1778-1782,* ed. Joseph W. Reed and Frederick Pottle (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977), 77. Of Charles Carmichael, who died in Bombay at the age of 20, in 1732 (when work on *The Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* is said

The matter of words was, therefore, important for Cleland. His mastery in the generation of synonymic formulae must be due, to some extent, to Cleland's interest in etymology. Few readers of *Fanny Hill* give significance to the fact that the person behind the novel also authored works bearing titles such as *A Dictionary of Love* (1753)*, The Way to Things by Words, and to Words by Things* (1766), or *Specimen of an Etimological Vocabulary* (1768), in which he employed himself in linguistic exercises of various types. Michael Ragussis observes that Cleland's interest in these topics is reflective of a major divide in the eighteenth century between the science of classification and the science of etymology:

> The science of classification requires a transparent vocabulary by which it attempts to strip names of their associations and ambiguities, even to invent an entirely new nomenclature that is naked and pure by virtue of its having no history. [...] In contrast, etymology seeks [...] to restore to the name its many historical associations, and thereby to bring into being all the names hidden within the name under investigation.[140]

Cleland seems to be operating through both these descriptors, since he both invents new names and activates those names through the use of words that preceded their creation. Etymology, indeed, bears an interesting relation to pornography. It pops up in various circumstances, as is the case in Thomas Stretzer's *A New Description of Merryland* (1741)*,* a textual experiment based on a pun on female genitalia, which begins with a mock etymological account drawing attention to the veils of pretentious or allusive language.

> The *Names* of most Countries have been much altered from those they were formerly known by; and even at this Day, different Nations, nay, People of the same Country, give different Names to the same Place. MERRYLAND, like other Countries, has been known under great Variety of Names, and perhaps now has as various Appellations as any Part of the Creation.[141]

The pseudo-lexicographic issue that this formulation addresses is that of unbounded freedom in the creation of new appellations for sexual organs. But this creation is founded on a pseudo-etymological account: "MERRYLAND, so named (as the learned

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to have started), Cleland says that he had furnished him with a manuscript of what represents the first part of *Fanny Hill.* (Ibid., n. 1) *L'École des filles* is the French title of what was translated into English as *The School of Venus* (first published in France in 1655).

[140] Michael Ragussis, *Acts of Naming. The Family Plot in Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 178.

[141] Thomas Stretzer, "A New Description of Merryland. Containing, A Topographical, Geographical, and Natural History of That Country," in *When Flesh Becomes Word. An Anthology of Early Eighteenth-Century Libertine Literature*, ed. Bradford K. Mudge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 259.

Antiquarians inform us) from the *Greek* Word μυρίζω, i.e. *Unguentis inungo*, alluding to the unctuous Nature of the Soil. [...] By the French it is called *Terre-Gaillarde*, from the *Greek* άγαΜιάώ, *Lætitiâ exulto*, or from γαίγ *Lætor*."[142] While in itself a mocking rendition of a dictionary entry, this account explores the immense possibilities of synonyms and puns, and recalls Cleland's witty appellations made to match the trades of Fanny's lovers (seamen, servants, merchants and so forth).

As with all textual forms, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* proposes a game at which the reader is invited to participate:

> I must trust to the candour of your judgment [...] and to your imagination and sensibility, the pleasing task of repairing [the problem of redundancy] by their supplements, where my descriptions flag or fail: the one will readily place the pictures I present before your eyes; the other gives life to the colours where they are dull, or worn with too frequent handling.[143]

The game, in this case, does not ask the reader to recognize the objects hidden under a metaphor or a simile, but rather to partake in the pleasure of the acknowledgment and perhaps even to admire the wit of the author. From this perspective, the role played by the reader is highly voyeuristic, but on the side it is what Freud calls *epistemophilic*. The type of desire triggered in the reader is not entirely corporal: it does not by necessity lead to masturbation, but to a kind of intellectual *jouissance*, the pleasure of the text. In order to attain this pleasure, one would have to accept the challenge of representation: to complete what is left unfinished in the author's account, to go past his remark in the beginning of the novel, "Truth! stark naked truth," as if without having noticed it.[144] For this reason, "Cleland's use of metaphor and euphemism for sexual organs and acts can be seen as an attempt not to conceal the referents and reduce the impact of sexually explicit scenes, but rather to increase their force."[145]

Foucault would have seen in this game an action against power: the individual empowered to fill with noise the all-encompassing silence in which sexuality is wrapped, and to do so by discussing sexuality in terms of repression (even when repression is no longer present):

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[142] Ibid. *Unguentis inungo* translates as "anointed with perfumes." *Terre Gaillarde* = "Merry Land"; *Laetor* = "I rejoice," or "I am merry." (n. 2 and 3: 317).
[143] Cleland, *Fanny Hill,* 91.
[144] Ibid., 1.
[145] Philip E. Simmons, "John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*: Literary Voyeurism and the Techniques of Novelistic Transgression," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 3 (1990): 57.

> What sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervour of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights.[146]

Pornography is one such exercise. Rétif de la Bretonne is said to have employed an entire machinery of deceptions to fool the establishment hostile to the publication of his *Le paysan perverti* (1775). He seems to have bribed the censor appointed to investigate his case, and to have worked intently on removing passages that looked too bold to pass the test of respectability, as well as adding titillating details. In all this, Rétif, in fact, "followed accepted practices in circumventing the law."[147] If he was not singular in this exercise, it follows that the pleasure of rebelling against power is indeed a vital element in representations of sexuality, as Foucault has suggested, and the main reason why pornography has never been vanquished:

> [T]he techniques of power exercised over sex have not obeyed a principle of rigorous selection, but rather one of dissemination and implantation of polymorphous sexualities; [...] the will to knowledge has not come to a halt in the face of a taboo that must not be lifted, but has persisted in constituting – despite many mistakes, of course – a science of sexuality.[148]

Following Foucault, Phillip E. Simmons contemplates precisely the possibility that *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* may be regarded as a way of reverting the logic of morality in order to generate a type of readership that could indulge, hypocritically, in officially denied pleasures: "We must think," Simmons argues, "of Cleland's readers as straddling the boundaries between pleasure and stricture, trying always to cover their pleasure with a veneer of morality."[149] The novel is a perfect vehicle for this kind of half-self-display-half-self-concealment from which the readers extract their enjoyment. It provokes readerly participation by offering an example of how one may hide what one desires, which is characteristic of the genre. As Patricia Meyer Spacks has indicated, "the appeal of pornography depends partly on its illusion of revealing what conventionally remains hidden."[150] By acknowledging this truth, the reader closes the gap that had engendered

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[146] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 7.
[147] Amy S. Wyngaard, "Defining Obscenity, Inventing Pornography: The Limits of Censorship in Rétif de la Bretonne," *Modern Language Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (March 2010): 20.
[148] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 12-13.
[149] Simmons, "John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*," 45.
[150] Spacks, *Privacy*, 13.

his/her embarrassment (if that embarrassment is even an issue) and makes it possible for the text to speak for itself, and thus to speak for readers too.

Tristram Shandy and typographic invisibilia

Tristram Shandy thrives on that which stands on the brink of revelation. This is probably why, as Viktor Shklovsky pointed out, "a cursory look at *Tristram Shandy* produces an impression of chaos."[151] Chaos, of course, is not a sign of anarchy. It is not as though the text had taken control of its own construction and had started propagating itself towards nowhere. On the contrary, if there is an author truly concerned with and decidedly capable of creating order out of the confusion that characterizes life, that author is Laurence Sterne. In *Tristram Shandy,* numerous events are told in the process of their being visualized, from the birth of the narrator to Uncle Toby's matrimonial exploits. If they are constantly postponed, stretched, given false hopes, this is because Sterne is interested in manipulating narrative material in a way that resembles manipulating life itself; and also because what matters in the novel is to keep narration active− to avoid creating dead ends.

Out of the dizzying multitude of possibilities that *Tristram Shandy* opens up, I discuss here one small but hugely relevant aspect, which I call *the empty-page event,* with reference to the famous page left blank by Sterne in Chapter XXXVIII of volume VI. In order, however, to arrive at a more complex understanding of the scene (one could never hope for an exhaustive one), I will have to start with some preliminary considerations as to what constitutes Sterne's predilection for typographic oddities.

The most obvious thing that can be said about these graphic devices, and what makes them relevant to my larger arguement, is that they conceal narrations. Behind the black or the marbled page, behind the string of illegible and uncategorizable scrawls meant to suggest the shape of a landscape, behind the syncopated punctuation, there lies an equal

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[151] Viktor Shklovsky, "The Parody Novel: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy,*" tr. Richards Sheldon, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*1, no. 1 (Spring 1981), 190.

amount of untold details, for the discovery of which the reader needs to become actively involved. There is no way to escape being pulled into the text of *Tristram Shandy*, because it ensnares one's attention through a sense of unfinished business (in the sense that the author, having completed only part of the representational task, leaves the rest in the reader's power to engender). This, of course, is not a matter to be restricted to the distinction between story and plot (*what* Sterne has to say and *how* he says it), but to be extended to the interstices that glue story and plot together. Punctuation marks, for instance, are the seams of the narrative of *Tristram Shandy*. They stitch the text together, but at the same time remain themselves visible, like threads that show through the fabric of a garment. Sterne was interested in leaving these stitches in full sight, as much as he was interested in leaving all his narrative techniques at the reader's discretion. His concern was to visualise as much as possible the processes of writing, of thinking about writing, and of writing about writing. For this reason, the placement of marks is important for conveying the message of transparency. Of all the critics who have written on Sternean punctuation, Christopher Fanning points out that "Sterne's work draws attention to the *mise en page,* a unique aspect of textuality that employs a notion of 'space' which differs from customary uses of that term in the criticism of fiction."[152] *Mise en page* is the layout of the text, a layout which is the text itself.

Moreover, punctuation marks puncture the narrative and allow readerly vision to penetrate beyond the mere conventionality that governs the manipulation of the rhythms of reading. As a consequence, the text seems to become transparent. In reality, however, it is not transparency that is generated here, but rather a text (a fabric) riddled with holes, in which resides the very meaning of the text. Gaps of this kind articulate the text by imposing on it a peculiar pace: whenever a hole is met, the reading halts. The resulting rhythm depends on the frequency, amount, and meaning of these stopovers. Sterne's use of dashes ("the most normal of [his] excursions into abnormal punctuation"[153]) is remarkably idiosyncratic, their length indicating the length of time the person who reads should spend in that place (doing nothing, or maybe taking a breath) before resuming reading. A Sternean dash "is not a 'point' at all, but occupies real, linear space, the same route along which the reading eye is travelling, and so it can challenge the narrative on its

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[152] Christopher Fanning, "On Sterne's Page: Spatial Layout, Spatial Form, and Social Space in *Tristram Shandy,*" *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 4 (July 1998): 431.
[153] Roger B. Moss, "Sterne's Punctuation," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15, no. 2 (1981-1982): 195.

own ground."[154] It has been suggested that Sterne's dashes were inspired by his experience as a clergyman. They seem to indicate the style of pauses and breaks performed during recitations of sermons, where they are meant to emphasize those parts of the oration that need to be reflected upon or listened to attentively by the audience.[155] As a result, the text becomes transparent in another sense as well: it ceases to signify printed form and implies instead orality. "One plausible theory about punctuation marks," and this is persuasive enough in the case of Sterne, "is that they are originally and essentially guides to reading aloud."[156] Sterne's dashes make it apparent that behind the actual text exists a desire to be read aloud, to be sermonised, to follow the indications of the novel's punctuation in order to gain the right pronunciation, which is the right name of things, as, of course, with the keyhole.

The tempo of *Tristram Shandy* is something akin to the way in which music is created by a musical box. A cylinder endowed with protuberant pins revolves so as to brush against a steel comb. The pins pluck various parts of that comb, and when they do, certain notes are activated, depending on the position of the pin and on its distance from the neighbouring pins. By putting together a series of such plucks a melody is created. The melody is, therefore, dependent on those tiny protuberances, which transform the cylinder into a textured surface.

In *Tristram Shandy*, punctuation operates in much the same way: it is musical, rhythmic. To Virginia Woolf, the sentences that Sternean punctuation had made possible seemed readable precisely because of their disconnectedness, which made them resemble the leaps of an untamed animal. As she says: "The jerky, disconnected sentences are as rapid and it would seem as little under control as the phrases that fall from the lips of a brilliant talker." And, to show what punctuation can do to such a novel, she continues: "Under the influence of this extraordinary style the book becomes semi-transparent. The usual ceremonies and conventions which keep reader and writer at arm's length disappear. We are as close to life as we can be."[157]

It cannot be stressed enough that in Sterne's prose punctuation assumes musicality by doing disservice to traditional renditions of time through print. ("Shall we," he asks at

[154] Ibid.
[155] Fanning, "On Sterne's Page," 434.
[156] Jonathan Rée, "Funny Voices: Stories, Punctuation, and Personal Identity," *New Literary History* 21, no. 4 (Autumn, 1990): 1041.
[157] Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader. Second Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), 79.

one point in the novel, "for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?"[158])

Sterne's punctuation is not entirely a matter of time, or timing (in spite of its musicality); it is also one of space, occupying places in the book and making claims to ownership over them. It is, therefore, topographic, and also typographic, in the sense that the space that so occupied is the space of the printed page, hence the *the empty-page event*.

The blank page in *Tristram Shandy* (6.38) stands for Sterne's concern with the participation of the unknown reader, with the possibilities opened by the novel to articulate this eminently invisible relationship. If anything, Sterne wants a non-passive reader. As Arnold Weinstein has pointed out, "to be Tristram's friend is [...] to keep one's own imagination as active as the author's is, even to project that imagination."[159] Weinstein makes this remark in order to highlight the difference between Sterne and Fielding, who is also engaged in an open dialogue with his readers ("Reader, take care!", "Here, reader!"[160]), but whose dialogue is one that takes place in a tightly controlled environment, where the author is the supreme holder of the threads that put the narrative puppetry in motion, and where the reader can only perform whatever has been preordained for them. One is reminded of Virginia Woolf again, who draws another connecting line with Sterne at one end: "[W]hile there are writers whose gift is impersonal, so that a Tolstoy, for example, can create a character and leave us alone with it, Sterne must always be there in person to help us in our intercourse."[161] Woolf is somehow exhilarated, so she does not notice the exaggeration: if the reader desires any help from Sterne, they will never get it. Representing is a job they have to do for themselves, because "Sterne is busy doing tricks, prancing or digressing, showing us his authorial sleight-of-hand tricks."[162]

This is also the case with the blank page. It is meant to highlight the role of desire and of the discomfort the reader experiences at having that desire exposed, as Roger Moss has suggested: "Sterne nudges us into seeing an equation between the embarrassment we feel at our desires and the embarrassment we feel in relation to the distinct acts of reading and writing. The empty space on the page tells the reader that he has created for

[158] Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 283.
[159] Weinstein, *Fictions of the Self,* 222.
[160] Fielding, *Tom Jones,* find pages (Book I, Chapter IV; Book II, Chapter VI)
[161] Woolf, *The Common Reader. Second Series*, 80.
[162] Weinstein, *Fictions of the Self,* 222.

himself a negative role, and describes for him his own mind in its refusal to provide a body."[163]

After having postponed the narration of the meeting between Uncle Toby and widow Wadman for the length of three consecutive volumes, the narrator finally accepts that he must outline the portrait of the female character. But in the characteristic Sternean manner, this will never happen, at least not in ways that might be expected of a novel. In order to describe the widow, Tristram creates a responsible (and responsive) reader. He initiates the process of representation not by performing a character description, but by calling the reader into the text of that very description: "For never did thy eyes behold, or thy concupiscence covet any thing in this world, more concupiscible than widow Wadman." And so Chapter XXXVII ends, abruptly. The next chapter starts with a renewal of the address, and a series of indications formulated by Tristram to help the reader into the un-materialized description:

> To conceive this right,—call for pen and ink—here's paper ready to your hand.——Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind——as like your mistress as you can——as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you—'tis all one to me ——please but your own fancy in it.[164]

And then the empty page follows, after which, the narrative is continued with the assumption that the process of representation (the sketch for which the reader had been provided with all the necessaries) has taken place.

> ————Was ever any thing in Nature so sweet!—so exquisite!
> ——Then, dear Sir, how could my uncle *Toby* resist it?
> Thrice happy book! thou wilt have one page, at least, within thy covers, which MALICE will not blacken, and which IGNORANCE cannot misrepresent.[165]

The desire that this narrative event is getting at is a complicated affair. It can be viewed as a desire to achieve the most accurate representation through a trick (as usual): the only way in which Sterne could make the reader have the best picture possible was to invite them to construct the picture themselves! On the other hand, the tension built in to the desire to finally see this long-anticipated woman is resolved through self-referentiality: whatever the figure on the reader's page, it will depict the image that he has always had of widow Wadman (or his wife, or his mistress). This is an ideal woman, whose ideal does

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[163] Moss, "Sterne's Punctuation," 189.
[164] Sterne, *Tristram Shandy,* 388.
[165] Ibid., 390.

not belong to the author, but to the tastes and the aspirations of the reader with whom he has opened the dialogue. "Was ever any thing in Nature so sweet?" is a question-affirmation, the answer to which is already known. It eradicates any chance for the reader to have a different viewpoint because it presupposes identity between his/her and the narrator's position. What we have here is an identity of intention, not of actual representation. While the portrait that will result on the page is expected to be idiosyncratically tied to the reader, the author and the reader are identical in that which represents their ability to draw that portrait. With the decision made, we now have no chance to answer 'no' to the question (no, there has been nothing "so sweet", "so exquisite"), because the text assumes that we have already reached agreement.

The insinuation of Toby's inability to resist strengthens the point about readerly interpretation. To resist what? The widow, or the window? (The pun is apt, since the empty page is an interface.) And here the reader is faced with another double possibility: was this temptation that Toby could not resist really *Toby's* desire to be acquainted with the beautiful woman, or rather *our* desire to draw on the page generously left empty by the author? Through this empty space, which is essentially a stop in the process of reading, the very barrier to vision that the page had seemed to represent is removed. And thus Sterne reveals that in a narrative affair the true barrier to vision is the complete surrender to authorial intention (an evil that literature has been struggling to defeat ever since *Tristram Shandy*).

Let us now compare *the empty-page event* to a strikingly similar case in Cleland's *Memoires of a Woman of Pleasure*. The heroine meets for the first time Charles, the sexual partner who will end up being her husband. He, drunk and fallen asleep along with his companions, is 'absent' from the scene, that is, they are not aware of Fanny's presence, and even less aware of her contemplative stance. For Fanny, on the other hand, this is a moment of rapture: an almost traumatic aesthetic experience of perceiving beauty undisturbed in front of her eyes. Her first reaction is to stop. Intensity requires pause. Words seem insufficient (there is descriptive, as well as lexical shortage here), or there is lack of lexical equipment to represent the object of the beholder's gaze: "But when I drew nearer, to view the sleeping one, heavens! what a sight! No! no term of years, no turn of fortune could ever erase the lightning-like impression his form made on me..."[166] The impasse of language signals a crisis of representation. For a second, or a mere fraction of a second, Fanny finds herself speechless. The gap opened by the missing

[166] Cleland, *Fanny Hill*, 34.

words is filled with punctuation, that is to say, with exclamations (expressions of the rapture constituting the foundation of the impasse).

But this is not built to last. In order to return to the position which she has deserted, that of omniscient presence in the narrative, the narrator calls upon *her* reader (the 'Madam' to which the novel is presented in epistolary form). "Figure to yourself, Madam," the following paragraph starts, thus passing the obligation to represent onto the addressee of the letter (and with her onto us, the *actual* readers of the novel). While the similarity between this moment and Sterne's opening up of the descriptive task to individuals outside the story is obvious, what is dissimilar is equally significant.

Fanny, we are told, is dumbstruck, and has fallen into a state of absorption. The "lightning-like" effect of the spectacle she experiences empties the field of vision, very much like Sterne's blank page (also a signal of a descriptive impasse). But unlike Sterne, who leaves the empty page empty, Cleland maintains the conventionality of the descriptive mode and provides the reader with the matter necessary for filling in the gap. "Figure to yourself, Madam" is not a formula for the complete surrender of the weapons of description into the arms of the freshly activated reader. In a narrative where description is succulent, vibrant, abundant, an impasse cannot be equated with defeat. It is, rather, a point whence description is encouraged to start afresh, endowed with even more vigour. "Figure to yourself, Madam, a fair stripling, between eighteen and nineteen, with his head reclin'd on one of the sides of the chair ...", and so on for almost a page. Blankness, which through the materiality of the typographical page remains forever blank in *Tristram Shandy* (a signpost), is ejected from *Fanny Hill*. Like the Aristotelians, convinced that empty space is impossible, Cleland fills the descriptive hole with nothing but more description.

To conclude: the blank page in *Tristram Shandy* is not a stop (not a dash!), but a door opened into the text. It invites the readers into the fabric of meaning by transferring onto them some of the authority that comes with the operations of making a text. Thus, a barrier to vision is eradicated: the barrier that had kept the reader outside the text. And thus, the invisible becomes visible: what had always constituted an active presence (the idiosyncratic participation of the person who reads) is revealed, materialized in the very matter of the narration. Before we know it, we find ourselves inside the text, contributing to its formation. There is no way to escape this temptation, this voyeuristic drive. This is not just the story of the novel, but of the keyhole and the microscope.

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