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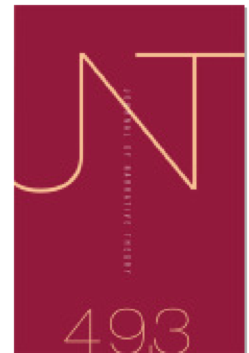

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> I do not think that we should attempt to see very clearly any scene that Milton depicts: it should be accepted as a shifting phantasmagory. (T.S. Eliot, "Milton" 199)

> The world dominated by its phantasmagories—this, to make use of Baudelaire's term, is "modernity." (Walter Benjamin 26)

Since the publication of Samuel Johnson's essay "Milton" in 1779, literary critics have been at pains to arrest the image from the "shifting phantasmagory" described by Eliot above.[1] Whereas Johnson asserts that *Paradise Lost* lacks "the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation" (708), Eliot, alighting on this supposed lack, pinpoints a "dissociation of sensibility" within modern poetry. He attributes this dissociation to the "aggravated [. . .] influence" of Milton: "In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered [. . .]. [W]hile the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude" ("The Metaphysical Poets" 247). Writing in the wake of Eliot's influential essay, F.R. Leavis continues to champion "Milton's dislodgement" from the canons of poetic taste, arguing that his verse "is incompatible with sharp, concrete realization" (50). Milton "exhibits a feeling for words," Leavis writes, "rather than a capacity for feeling *through* words; we are often, in reading him, moved to comment that he is 'external' or

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that he 'works from the outside'" (50). More recently, Joanna Picciotto has argued that "while Milton provides a very solid sense of the physical reality of the observational conditions he sets up, he leaves what is seen under these conditions largely up to us, making *Paradise Lost* a literal trial to read, its images only as vivid as the reader works to render them" (47).

While these arguments differ in their approach to the Miltonic image, they each make the act of 'seeing' central to Milton's verse. So whether the purpose is to criticize the opacity of the Miltonic image (Johnson, Eliot, Leavis) or to underscore the "labor of seeing" (Picciotto) that Milton shares with experimentalists such as Hooke, Boyle, and Bacon, the telos remains the same: to determine the extent of Milton's modernity in terms of the clarity, perspicacity, and moral rigor of his images. These "attempt[s] to see" have resulted in what we might well call, following Jacques Rancière, a "distribution of the sensible" with regard to the Miltonic image, which continues to haunt the ways we 'moderns' speak of the image and of the relationship between the sensible and the political today (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 12–19). Indeed, as I argue in this essay, Milton's images are not clear and still; they are mobile, active, and often obscure—not other than visual but extra-visual. In twentieth-century literary criticism alone, the act of seeing the Miltonic image meant situating oneself within an economy of shifting perceptions: what there was to see was never 'clearly' given and how to see was precisely what was at stake.[2] Though the verbal icon has a long and robust multisensory history extending beyond Milton,[3] my goal here is to challenge ableist readings of Milton's poetry by linking his poetic ekphrasis to the politics and aesthetics of disability.[4]

As early as 1936, in "A Note on the Verse of Milton," Eliot rejected Milton as a "bad influence" on modern poetry, stating that "Milton's poetry could only be an influence for the worse [. . .]. [I]t was an influence upon which we still have to struggle" (12, 11). Notable for my purposes, Eliot's overt nationalistic rhetoric about the "deterioration [. . .] to which [Milton] subjected the [English] language" slides into a discussion of Milton's health and vitality as a poet (12). This eugenic discourse begins with Eliot interpolating his proper reader as the able-bodied judge: "in some vital respects [. . .] of what I have to say I consider that the only jury of judgment is that of the ablest poetical practitioners of my own time" (13). From here Eliot proceeds to underline Milton's blindness as the root cause

of his "bad influence" on modern poetry: "The most important fact about Milton, for my purpose, is his blindness [. . .]. At no period is the visual imagination conspicuous in Milton's poetry" (13). Although there is much to be wary of in Eliot's argument, part of what I hope to accomplish in this paper is to show that Eliot, against his own protestations, theorizes in his attention to Milton's blindness a disability aesthetic at cross-purposes with the dominant (nationalistic and eugenic) vision that he (along with Pound) wants for modern poetry. I find the lineaments of this counter-modernity in Eliot's protestation not to see.

Along with W.J.T. Mitchell, this essay asks the most basic questions first: What is an image? And, what does an image want? Neither question is directly about the subject of disability, and yet for reasons that are inescapable, Mitchell begins his investigation into iconology in a disability frame, stating:

> This is a book about the things people say about images. It [. . .] has no illustrations except for a few schematic diagrams, a book about vision written as if by a blind author for a blind reader. If it contains any insight into real, material pictures, it is the sort that might come to a blind listener, overhearing the conversation of sighted speakers talking about images. (*Iconology* 1)

Mitchell's study is not about pictures per se but about the conditions of possibility for imaging; it is thus a "rhetoric of images," an infrastructural study of "the ways in which [images] seem to speak for themselves" (2). As such, it looks to the "patterns" within images "that would be invisible to the sighted" (1). We can call this approach to images 'dis-iconology,' in reference to the blindness associated with any act of seeing. For my part, I wish to foreground this blind seeing as an aesthetic technology—taking technology in the root sense of *techne*, as a logic of connection—internal to every act of imaging.[5] How might we apprehend the Miltonic image differently, beyond the iconoclast's opposition between true and false perception, as prosthetic?

In what follows, my concern is not with mimesis, with the visible and the invisible, with objectivity, veridicality, or with distortion. These are epistemological concerns and as such are indebted to the logics of repre-

sentation. Rather, my concern regarding the image—Milton's image—is with its movement or activity. Criticism, Eliot writes, "should be able [. . .] to make an old masterpiece actual, give it contemporary importance, and persuade [its] audience that it is interesting, exciting, enjoyable, and *active*" ("Milton" 186). Echoing his claim in "The Tradition and the Individual Talent" that "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone," Eliot's emphasis on the active tense of the past—of a past that has never been past—entails a radical reworking of our commonplace notions of time, historicity, and the periodizing mechanisms that constitute our modernity (4). I would add that Eliot's approach to the Miltonic image as an activity in its own right, not as a static re-presentation but as a doing, brings to the forefront important questions about the ontology of the image—about what an image is and what it can be. As Rancière avers, such questions concern nothing short of "how a certain idea of [our] fate and a certain idea of the image are tied up" (*The Future of the Image* 1). Against "apocalyptic discourses" (1) that characterize the image as a power to reduce agents to spectators and politics to spectacle, Rancière asks: "are we in fact referring to a simple, univocal reality? Does not the term 'image' contain several functions whose problematic alignment precisely constitutes the labour of art?" (1). For Rancière, neither time nor history, materiality nor agency, are lost upon the image. The question proper to the Miltonic image, then, is not centrally one of judgment or periodization, but of action or tempo: not what does the image represent, but what does it do?[6]

From Johnson to Eliot to today, critics have not tired of defining Milton as a breaker of images.[7] But what if, in fact, the author of *Eikonoklastes* (1649) is saying something entirely different: not that we should try to break images but, on the contrary, that images themselves are already irremediably broken, already fragile and dispersed? What if, in other words, the point is not to see through Milton's images but to reorganize our assumptions about what an image is, fundamentally, and what it can be?

Against modern aims to see and see clearly what the image represents, this paper puts forth Milton's blindness as an active or creative force in the archive or counter-archive of modernity—what disability theorist Lennard J. Davis has renamed "dismodernity" (27–32). By suggesting that Milton foregrounds a disability aesthetic at cross-purposes with modern regimes of visuality, I mean to signal that I am not attempting a sociology of vi-

sion, as can be found for example in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's study on staring. Whereas much of the work done in disability studies on the sociology of vision wants to bring the disabled body into the visual spectrum by diversifying forms of recognition and making our representational systems more inclusive, my interest in the aesthetics of Milton's blindness is both non-visual and non-representational. I do not want to bring Milton's disability into the visual fold; rather, through Milton's disability, I want to understand what else imaging can be. Accordingly, this paper does not seek to claim or disclaim Milton's images but to move beyond iconoclasm toward a different apprehension of the image, to explore what happens when our eyes touch, taste, smell, or hear.[8]

Beyond Iconoclasm

Although much important scholarship has been devoted in recent years to the subject of early modern images, from the materiality of religious images (Bynum 37–123) to the image of objectivity (Daston and Galison), these studies tend to privilege visuality as the primary and most important form of engagement that early moderns had with their environment. From New Historicism's interest in Foucaultian analyses of surveillance, scopic regimes, and panopticism (Greenblatt, Sawday) to psychoanalytic theorizations of spectatorship and the gaze (Mulvey, Silverman) to historical narratives about the emergence of scientific technologies of vision (McLuhan, Ong), the reigning conceit among theorists of modernity and early modernity is that of the dominance of the eye and the weakening of the other senses.[9] Consequently, the importance of today's new digital technologies is less the postulation that the image is non-indexical or non-representational (that is something that scholars of 'old media' have long been aware of) but rather the insistence that the image itself is not strictly or *prima facie* visual, and that to be against seeing (in its ocularcentric formations) is not *de facto* to be against the image.[10] Studies of Milton's iconoclasm have hitherto missed this point.[11]

In this essay, I propose that Milton's images are not only visual but also audiovisual and tactile, which is to say that Milton does not denounce images. My first hypothesis, instead, is that he seeks to expose other properties of the image and to venture, as Jacques Derrida ventures in his book on Jean-Luc Nancy, what happens when our eyes touch, taste, smell, or

hear (*On Touching* 1–8). My second hypothesis is this: for Milton, perception is technological. Thus the opposition between true perception and false perception (the iconoclast's hallowed logic) is something he fiercely rebels against.

In "Optics," René Descartes sets out to "explain how [. . .] rays [of light] enter into the eye, and how they may be deflected by the various bodies they encounter" (57). Focusing solely on the mechanics of this encounter between light and eye, Descartes makes "three comparisons" meant to "facilitate that conception of light which [. . .] we"—"we" the sighted—"know through experience" (57). The first of these comparisons is that of a blind man with walking sticks:

> No doubt you have had the experience of walking at night over rough ground without a light, and finding it necessary to use a stick in order to guide yourself. You may then have been able to notice that by means of this stick you could feel the various objects situated around you [. . .]. It is true that this kind of sensation is somewhat confused and obscure in those who do not have long practice with it. But consider it in those born blind, who have made use of it all their lives: with them, you will find, it is so perfect and so exact that one might almost say that they see with their hands, or that their stick is the organ of some sixth sense given to them in place of sight [. . .]. I would have you consider the light in bodies we call "luminous" to be nothing other than a certain movement, or very rapid and lively action, which passes to our eyes through the medium of the air and other transparent bodies, just as the movement or resistance of the bodies encountered by a blind man passes to his hand by means of his stick. (58)

Note that Descartes uses the image of the blind man for visual ends, stating: "one might *almost* say that they [the blind] see with their hands" (my emphasis). Almost. Descartes goes so far as to say that seeing is extended touch, a prosthetic "movement" or "lively action" carried out like the relay between hand, stick, and object. Descartes says this while preserving the alterity of sight for the sighted. Milton, by contrast, does not just use the comparison of the blind man for visual ends; instead, he radicalizes it,

making prosthetic touch identical to vision rather than a substitute "in place of sight," sight's second. For Milton, blind poet *par excellence*, vision is by necessity *techne* or technological: it is prosthetic.[12]

In pursuing these entangled arguments, I find an unlikely ally in Eliot. In his estimation, Milton was always blind.[13] This is not a critique of Milton (Eliot made his fair share of those, too) but a way of saying that any critique of Milton's images as poor visual renderings or iconoclastic renderings are from the start misguided. According to Eliot's counterfactual claim, Milton was always blind, meaning that his images were always something more than visual. We can liken the blindness of the Miltonic image to the "pure optical and sound" images theorized by Gilles Deleuze: these images do not convey the actions of a subject; they traverse the subject in a pure sensory situation that "makes us grasp, it is supposed to make us grasp, something intolerable and unbearable" (*Cinema 2* 18). For Deleuze, it is the intolerability of the image that makes a film "visionary." Hence his claim that "the history of the cinema is a long martyrology"; "the great cinema directors are [. . .] merely more vulnerable" (*Cinema 1* xiv). In the cinema of the intolerable, which is "a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent [*de voyant, non plus d'actant*]," seeing is prosthetic (*Cinema 2* 2). Rather than represent an object for a subject, the image brings the eye into a contingent, multisensory relation with its machinic counterpart, the camera. As Claire Colebrook glosses Deleuze, "Cinema, or the creation of the connection among images, and the coupling of the human eye with those images, demonstrates that a particular and contingent connection—the camera and the eye—can open a new thought of how it is that life connects" (8). How "life connects" in Milton's case is a question of the "shifting phantasmagory," or the machinic assemblage of images that Eliot describes, in no idle terms, as an impasse to seeing and a spur to the other senses.

Writing in a late essay on Milton, Eliot makes a singular, albeit ambivalent, attempt to release the Miltonic image to its full, surrealist potential. And here I mean 'release' in the sense that Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell have recently defined that term. To release the image, they write, is "nothing less than an alteration of the senses" (1). Writing on Derek Jarman's *Blue*, a film in which all that appears over the duration of seventy-six minutes is a deep blue color projected onto a screen accompanied by an audio track featuring music, recordings of city sounds, and Jarman's

own reflections about his films and his personal battle with AIDS, Khalip and Mitchell write:

> in the context of this film, "to see" does not mean yielding to an index of a thing or an event that is understood as located in a cinematic beyond; rather, it means reorganizing our assumptions about perception and images [. . .]. In a film that gives nothing to see but blueness, the image materializes as a temporally complex entity that nears the blindness intrinsic to perception itself, and "seeing" becomes an encounter with an opacity that is specific to sight. The apparent visual poverty of Jarman's film—a poverty that we might take as emblematic of a more widespread strategy in twentieth-century avant-garde film and visual works of art—is thus an attempt to pose two related questions: what *is* an image? And—perhaps more important—what *can* an image be? (1–2)

For Eliot, the answer to these questions entails shifting our general "mode of apprehension," a kind of aesthetic re-education of the body ("Milton" 199). The goal, he writes, in reading Milton is not to see any image in the singular. Rather, "our sense of sight must be blurred":

> We must [. . .] in reading *Paradise Lost*, not expect to see clearly; our sense of sight must be blurred, so that our hearing may become more acute. *Paradise Lost* [. . .] makes this peculiar demand for a readjustment of the reader's mode of apprehension. The emphasis is on the sound, not the vision, upon the word, not the idea; and in the end it is the unique versification that is the most certain sign of Milton's intellectual mastership. (199)

In an interpretive gesture which we would now recognize as disability theory *avant la lettre*, Eliot suggests that it is Milton's physical blindness that materially instantiates the "weakness" and "limitation" of his images, not as "a negligible defect, but as a positive virtue" (198–99). Milton's "limitation of visual power" produces poor images, but images that are rich in cross-modal perception. As Tobin Siebers writes, "All disabled bodies"—and here I would add, all bodies—"create this confusion of tongues—and

eyes and hands and other body parts. For the deaf, the hand is the mouth of speech, the eye, its ear. Deaf hands speak. Deaf eyes listen" (53). For Milton, the eye is in the hand and ear (of another). *Paradise Lost* testifies to this audiovisual and tactile assemblage of body parts: dictated by Milton, recorded by his daughter, and then read back to Milton, the poem—far from being negatively disabled by Milton's blindness—becomes the site of a multisensory and trans-gender collaboration and production.[14] Milton's imagery belongs to this prosthetic circuitry of eye-hand-ear-daughter.

Seeing without Seeing

That sensory relations other than seeing matter greatly to the epistemological and visual coordinates of Milton's epic poem is readily apparent from what is perhaps its most notorious moment of blindness and insight: the scene in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost* in which Milton apostrophizes the heavens, "Hail holy light," and asks, "since God is light," that he take away the "ever-during dark" and "shine inward" (3.1, 3, 45, 52):

> the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight. (3.52–55)[15]

Milton writes at the moment at which, according to Michel Foucault, "the relation between the visible and invisible" was beginning to undergo upheaval; when, at the birth of modern medicine and scientific discourse, "a new alliance was forged between words and things," and "the eye becomes the depository and source of clarity" and "the power to bring a truth to light" (*The Birth of the Clinic* xii, xiii). At this moment of historical transition, Milton's characteristic chiaroscuro would seem to signal not only the twilight of early modernity as it passes into modernity but also the poet's own desire to make his eyes the "depository" of truth and light. Such Enlightenment narratives have often been told with Milton at their center.[16] But the division of the sensible that distributes light and dark, seen and non-seen, is not, in Milton's case, the function of a subject who sees; rather, the subject who sees is an effect of that distribution, "a place within visibility," as Deleuze writes (*Foucault* 21). The speaker's prayer "that I may see and tell"

thus does not constitute the speaker as an autonomous spectator, a producer of clear images, or a bearer of truth and light, for the speaker's vision is already the product of an encounter: "there plant eyes." The involution of flora and flesh does not so much "purge" but rather enhance the poet's blindness, making him more receptive to God's light even if he is, like a plant, in total darkness. The becoming-plant of Milton's eyes enfolds darkness and light, opacity and transparency, blindness and insight, making the subject who sees as much a part of that movement of inner and outer, lightness and dark, as the image or object he purports to represent. In this heliotropic movement, the expression "plant eyes," which plays on the confusion of verb and adjective, signals at once a loss of passive contemplation and a turn toward an active, albeit blind, intervention of the seer in the image.

Milton's floral-fleshy eyes, his leafy-prosthetic implants, supplement his poetic vision, raising Derrida's question about the invention of the image: does the image reveal something, a presence, already there, or does it create something artificial, a supplement (*Copy, Archive, Signature* 43)? *Poiesis* or *techne*, then? From Plato to Benjamin, the question of invention has been a support for iconoclasm, anti-fetishism, and image-breaking in all of its manifestations, insofar as the image as revelation has been held in isolation from production, substitution, intervention, and prosthesis. It is for this reason that Derrida, speaking of the photographic image, distinguishes between two forms of invention: namely "invention as a discovery or a revelation of what already is there" and "invention as technical intervention, as the production of a new technical apparatus that constitutes the other instead of simply receiving him" (43). This double sense of invention leads Derrida to ask the following question: "Can we not say that there was already in photography, in the classic sense, as much production as recording of images, as much act as gaze, as much performative event as passive archivization?" (6). How, in other words, might we speak of a prosthetic perception that breaks "with the presumed phenomenological naturalism that would see in photographic technology the miracle of a technology that effaces itself in order to give us a natural purity, [. . .] a pretechnical perception" (8–9)? Speaking of the technicity or performativity intrinsic to perception, Derrida says this about photography:

> It is necessary to recall that in photography there are all sorts of initiatives: not only framing but point of view, calculation

> of light, adjustment of the exposure, overexposure, underexposure, etc.? These interventions [. . .], to the extent that they produce the image and constituted something of an image [*de l'image*], they modify reference itself, introducing multiplicity, divisibility, substitutivity, replaceability. [. . .] [T]his reflection [. . .] leads us retrospectively to say the same thing about what at first appears as pretechnical, that is, perception. We can no longer oppose perception and technics; there is no perception before the possibility of prosthetic iterability; and this mere possibility marks, in advance, both perception and the phenomenology of perception. (7, 14–15)

Marking perception as always already post-phenomenological, Derrida invites us to see the machinic within perception itself. This form of hospitality does not, unlike phenomenology, presuppose the existence of the seer and the seen, but rather produces seer and seen as effects of an ongoing iterative operation, one that is as much technical as it is perceptual, active as passive, inhuman as human. 'To see' in this sense means confronting an opacity or blindness intrinsic to perception itself, for seeing in this account is already the effect of a materialization, or better yet, prostheticization, which happens each time the eye opens and shuts. To quote Deleuze (who quotes Bergson): "the eye is in things, in luminous images in themselves. 'Photography, if there is photography, is already snapped, already shot, in the very interior of things and for all the points of space'" (*Cinema 1* 60).

While Deleuze, Bergson, and Derrida focus primarily on the prosthetic nature of the photographic and cinematographic image, Milton marks, in print, the possibility of prosthetic iterability from (and in) the beginning. Writing to a friend in 1654, roughly two years after his blindness had become total, Milton describes his vision as a form of exposure, of negative becoming positive, darkness becoming light, and as a movement whereby the eye records, as if through a shutter, a stimulus of flashing light. He describes this stimulus as "a certain trifle of light" emanating from the darkness of his eyes:

> But I should not forget to mention that, while yet a little sight remained, when first I lay down in bed, and turned myself to either side, there used to shine out a copious glit-

> tering light from my shut eyes; then that, as my sight grew less from day to day, colours proportionally duller would burst from them, as with a kind of force and audible shot from within; but that now, as if the sense of lucency were extinct, it is a mere blackness, or a blackness dashed, and as it were inwoven, with an ashy grey, that is wont to pour itself forth. Yet the darkness which is perpetually before me, by night as well as by day, seems always nearer to a whitish than to a blackish, and such that, when the eye rolls itself, there is admitted, as through a small chink, a certain little trifle of light. (qtd. in Sorsby 341)

That this description appears to us in cinematographic terms, or better yet, as a form of photography, or light-writing, is not insignificant: it testifies to the intimate collusion, to which Milton scholars have repeatedly returned, though often unfavorably, between Milton's imagery and the prostheticization of the gaze, of which the encounter between eye and machine would be only one manifestation. There is also, as I have mentioned, Milton's affinity for the encounter between eye and plant: a strange photosynthesis.

While many accounts of Milton's images appear in scholarship, from the seductive imagery descried by Stanley Fish as the lure of theology (5–12, 38), to the ongoing political debates over Milton's iconoclasm, to the recent interest in Milton's experimentalist affinity for returning to "things themselves" (Bacon 5),[17] none (excepting Eliot) have taken seriously Milton's blindness as a constitutive element in the poet's theological, political, and experimental artistry. We would have our poet blind, it would seem, but not the poetry. Turning to Books 11 and 12 of *Paradise Lost*, I argue that they not only make the experience of blindness a central issue in Milton's poem (from beginning to end) but also challenge the scholarly opinion—strongly held in Miltonist circles—that what is 'modern' about Milton can be seen or read, for better or worse, in the ascendency of the image over the non-visual senses. Milton advances a disability aesthetic that is at once prosthetic (because it entangles subject and object in a supplementary assemblage of human and nonhuman body parts) and non-visual (because 'seeing' for Milton always implies something more than vision).

"For He Had Much to See"

If the early modern way of 'seeing' tended to observe rich patterns of resemblance between human, animal, and plant, the modern episteme would, according to Foucault, come to parse this unruly fabric of all of its poetic flourish, leaving us the bare syntax, "the prose of the world" for the eye to consume (*The Order of Things* 17). Books 11 and 12 of *Paradise Lost* focus our attention on both of these times at once: the time before resemblance gave way and the time after, when, the story goes, the regimes of visual mastery became dominant.

In Books 11 and 12, Milton brings these two narratives to a crisis: highlighting a world in which plant and human not only stood face to face but also saw in each other's faces a signature and a reflection, Milton's poem breaks from the world of resemblance and becomes an art of the "time-image" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* xi). *Paradise Lost* offers us an image of time itself, not in order to reaffirm postlapsarian narratives, disenchantment narratives, or their complement, the narrative of progressive Enlightenment, but to show forth, from the vantage of a certain contretemps, other properties of the image. By collapsing past, present, and future, Milton forces us to 'see' the image not in terms of resemblance or mastery, true knowledge or false knowledge, but in terms of a different sensory economy.

Beginning with a scene reminiscent of the earlier encounter between eye and plant, "there plant eyes" (3.53) becomes literalized in Book 11 as the angel Michael reveals to Adam the consequences of his fall. In what follows, one floral prosthesis is removed for another:

> but to nobler sights
> Michael from Adam's eyes the film removed,
> Which that false fruit, that promised clearer sight,
> Had bred; then purged with euphrasy and rue
> The visual nerve, for he had much to see;
> And from the well of life three drops instilled.
> So deep the power of these ingredients pierced,
> Even to the inmost seat of mental sight,
> That Adam, now enforced to close his eyes,
> Sunk down and all his spirits became entranced. (11.411–20)

As in the soliloquy in Book 3, where the speaker laments to God that "these eyes [. . .] roll in vain / To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn," reasoning that it is because "So thick a drop serene hath quenched their orbs, / Or dim suffusion veiled," so Michael in the lines above removes "from Adam's eyes the film" that shutters his sight (3.23–24, 25–26). Just as Milton's "drop serene" (*gutta serena*, or clear drop, a contemporary medical term for the cataracts that, though clear, "veiled" Milton's eyes) prevents Milton from knowing God's "light" directly, so it is by way of the Tree of Knowledge ("that false fruit") that Adam becomes blind to "nobler sights." Hence Michael does for Adam what Milton could not: he removes the "film" or cataracts caused by carnal sight.

Yet even with this "film removed," Adam remains blind, his "clearer sight" still veiled. In answer to the speaker's prayer (voiced earlier), "there plant eyes," Michael removes the film from Adam's eyes only to darken them anew: "euphrasy and rue," herbal remedies for the eyes, here pierce "to the inmost seat of mental sight," becoming leafy prostheses to Adam's optic nerve. If Milton exhibits a fascination for the eye, then that fascination is best understood in a strictly negative manner: not as the power to see and see clearly, but as the distinctly negative capability to make of blindness the condition of what is. Thus, although "nobler sights" are properly conditioned by the eye, Milton denatures this proper condition by making the human eye a strange alchemical implant, a prosthetic extension of the surface area and imaging power of plants. Henceforth it is not Adam who sees but rather the intra-acting patterns of plant-eye-light-matter. This is more than just an analogous relation because, as Agamben notes of the signature relation between the eye and euphrasia, the euphrasia plant does not just appear like the eye; much more provocatively, the euphrasia plant is in the eye (37). It is in this sense that we are to read Adam's state of physical and spiritual suspension—the literal meaning of "entranced"—as a form of chiasmus or crossing.

Crossed with the receptive powers of plants, Adam falls asleep, "enforced to close his eyes" (11.419). When he awakes (or rather if he awakes), he finds that indeed, "he had much to see" (11.415). Suturing the reader's eye to a scene of traumatic witnessing, Michael enjoins Adam, "now ope thine eyes, and first behold / The effects which thy original crime hath wrought" (11.423–24). Adjusting the aperture of his gaze ("His eyes he opened" [11.429]) to a scene both devastating and familiar, Adam

looks to "a field, / Part arable and tilth" (11.429–30) and sees, first, a vegetable sacrifice, "A sweaty reaper from his tillage brought / First fruits" (11.434–35), and second, an animal sacrifice:

> a shepherd next
> More meek came with the firstlings of his flock
> Choicest and best; then sacrificing, laid
> The innards and their fat, with incense strewed,
> On the cleft wood, and all due rites performed.
> His offering soon propitious fire from heaven
> Consumed with nimble glance, and grateful steam;
> The other's not, for his was not sincere;
> Whereat he inly raged, and as they talked,
> Smote him into the midriff with a stone
> That beat out life; he fell, and deadly pale
> Groaned out his soul with gushing blood effused.
> Much at that sight was Adam in his heart
> Dismayed. (11.436–449)

If, as Emmanuel Levinas argues, seeing is a form of adequation or consumption of otherness,[18] then we can hardly do better than Milton's Old Testament representation of God to illustrate this fearful incorporation by the gaze. In contrast to the signature relation that displaced the euphrasia into Adam's eye, here the eye (Adam's, God's, and by extension the reader's) takes on a detached, spectatorial quality. We are confronted with an image of "what is to come" (12.11), and included in this image is a new relation to seeing. From the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's God appears as an omnipotent spectator: "he sits / High throned above all height, [. . .] his eye, / His own works and their works at once to view" (3.57–59). In the lines above, however, God-as-spectator becomes quite literally a God of visual consumption. Unlike Adam, whose prosthetic vision puts the eye directly in things, God's eye devours. His "nimble glance" wields "fire" and "steam"; no sooner had he cathected Abel's animal sacrifice than the meat was instantly "consumed." What we are confronted with, then, is an opposition or choice between two ways of seeing: blindness on the one hand and visual mastery on the other.

And yet, as I have already suggested, this is really no opposition at all. Against the modern opposition to see or not to see, Milton's image is al-

ready elsewhere, already beyond iconoclasm, fetishism, and vision. Take Adam's response to the final image, that of the blood-soaked body of Abel:

> But have I now seen death? Is this the way
> I must return to native dust? O sight
> Of terror, foul and ugly to behold!
> Horrid to think, how horrible to feel! (11.462–65)

Adam does not see the image so much as "feel" it. The image strikes Adam, producing a "shock to thought" more tactile than visual and more opaque than clear (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 156). To "think" the image in this case, which is to say, to remember or imagine it, is to have it etched or imprinted as a mental scar, a trauma that escapes the containment of both visibility and intelligibility,[19] hence the hanging interrogative: "But have I now seen death?" (11.462). What Adam "sees" is not just the strangeness of the cadaver but, as Maurice Blanchot would have it, the strangeness of the cadaver *become* image: "It is striking," Blanchot writes, "that at this very moment, when the cadaverous presence is the presence of the unknown before us, the mourned deceased begins to *resemble himself.* [. . .] The cadaver is its own image" (257–58). The image of the cadaver suspends the viewer's relation to the present, and yet it is precisely this nonrelation of the image to the present that enables the dead to circulate among the living as image. What Adam "sees" in this image is above all an opacity, but it is an opacity that he can touch and feel.[20] Adam's inability to make sense of what he sees results in neither a rejection of the image nor blind acceptance, but rather another sense of the image—of what an image is and what it can be. Adam's feeling for the image short-circuits the visual register completely. In the next book, he, along with Eve, makes of this disability a supplementary capacity to hear.

"For I Have Drenched Her Eyes"

Book 12 begins in a mood of disquiet before the image of "what is to come" (12.11), as the angel Michael, prompted by an image too intolerable for "mortal sight" (12.9), prevails upon Adam the "needs" of "human sense" (12.10), saying: "Much thou hast yet to see, but I perceive / Thy

mortal sight to fail; objects divine / Must needs impair and weary human sense" (12.8–10). To be sure, we can read Adam's failure "to see" as a negative theological statement about the inaccessibility of "objects divine" to "mortal sight." Alternatively, we can read it as an iconoclastic statement about the imperative to break false idols. Still more, Adam's failure can be read as an experimentalist predicament resulting from the shortcomings of "human sense" and the need for a more scientific "labor of seeing." Yet none of these readings will have questioned the need "to see," much less underscored what it means for an image to "impair and weary human sense." While Adam's failure to see surely suggests the iconoclast's distrust of imagery rather than a rhapsodic treatment of this failure, Milton eschews the language of impairment by torqueing the reader's attention toward a different sensory economy. Continuing from the last line, Michael says to Adam: "Henceforth what is to come I will relate, / Thou therefore give due audience, and attend" (12.11–12). Adam's failure to see transforms the image into an audiovisual and tactile medium, one that encompasses both reader and text. To "attend" to the image, henceforth, means not simply "to see" but "to turn one's ear," "to watch over, minister to, wait upon, follow, frequent," to touch and be touched, to temporize as well as to tender (from the Latin *tendere*, meaning to stretch out, hold out, or offer) ("Attend, v."). Rather than invoke the language of the fallen senses, Milton proffers a prosthetic ecology in which the relays between subject and object, visual and non-visual senses, are compellingly foregrounded. Nowhere is this prosthetic ecology more pronounced than in the case of Eve.

From her earliest memory, that of being awakened and newly created by the "murmuring sound / Of waters" (4.453–54), to her eventual fall at "the sound" of the serpent's "persuasive" tongue (9.736–37), Eve's unique relation to sound renders vision secondary at best to the ontological status of the image. While Adam, at the "news" of his expulsion from the Garden of Eden, "Heart-struck with chilling gripe of sorrow stood" waiting upon the image to be revealed to him, Eve, who is "unseen," *un-sees*, as it were, all that Michael has to show—and "Yet all had heard" (11.263, 264, 265–66). Eve hears rather than sees. Her secondary status as auditor, not seer, means that she is excluded from the fields of vision and the nightmarish images that "impair" Adam. Her blindness is differently "enforced." And yet, this secondary status, or this gendered division of the

senses, has its own (re)visionary potential. While excluded from Adam's "entranced" vision, Eve receives her own nocturnal image of things to come. This image comes to her audibly in a dream—a dream added, in supplementary fashion, to the fate imaged by Adam.

Just before giving Adam his pharmacological eye drops, the angel Michael douses Eve's eyes (between parentheses no less), saying, "let Eve (for I have drenched her eyes) / Here sleep below while thou to foresight wak'st, / As once though slep'st, while she to life was formed" (11.367–69). Here, in a sequence of lines worthy of a Shakespearean dreamscape, Michael plays a pseudo-Puck, drenching lovers' eyes and inducing "slumbered [. . .] visions" (Shakespeare 5.1.417–18). One can well imagine Eve, upon awakening, echoing the sensory confusion of the erstwhile ass, Bottom, who wakes to a humbling realization about the limitations of able-bodied vision: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen [. . .] what my dream was" (4.1.209–12). More than just comedic *de rigueur*, Bottom's discovery of an alternative sensory economy speaks to the confusion of tongues, eyes, and ears that Siebers attributes to disabled bodies (53) and that Milton (following Shakespeare) gains access to through the blind sleep of dreams. For indeed, just as Adam "became entranced" in order to see, so Eve, eyes "drenched" by Michael's liquid suffusion, becomes blind with sleep—the better to hear her dream. Such dreamscapes are more than mere fantasy, for these blind visions also contaminate the light of day. We need only remember Milton's own avowal, at the start of Book 9, that a "celestial patroness" with "nightly visitation unimplored" "dictates to me slumbering, or inspires / Easy my unpremeditated verse" to be dissuaded from thinking that the stuff of dreams is mere nonsense or chatter (9.21, 22, 23–24). For Eve as well as for Milton, dreams pass the wakeful image through the sieve of night, releasing the image to the voice, echo, and murmur of non-visualizable potentials; they even "dictate" Milton's poem. As Eve relates:

> Whence thou return'st, and whither went'st, I know;
> For God is also in sleep, and dreams advise,
> Which he hath sent propitious, some great good
> Presaging, since with sorrow and heart's distress
> Wearied I fell asleep. (12.610–14)

From sleep to wakefulness, when Adam returns to Eve, he finds her "wearied," unable (or unwilling) to reveal the contents of her dream. Once again, this weariness is registered by Milton not as a failure to visualize but as an altered relation of sense to "foresight" (11.368). While Adam "had much to see," Eve's dream vision transpires audibly—and to Eve's ears alone. We do not see Eve's dream. Nor do we experience it indirectly through Michael's narration. Eve as secretary to God's dictation makes secret what matters most about the dream, keeping in private the future that God has in store.[21] Eve thus not only revises the future imaged by Adam; she makes of her secondary (non-seeing) role as auditor key to the future of the image as such. For if we are the inheritors of Adam's vision, we are also the secretaries to Eve's audible "foresight." The future of the image, if there is a future of the image (to use Rancière's non-apocalyptic phrase) beyond iconoclasm, will depend on keeping this lacunary nocturne alive.

Beyond the Twilight of the Idols

> It would be a delicate practice that struck images with just enough force to make them resonate, but not so much as to smash them. (Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* 9)

Well over a century after Friedrich Nietzsche first introduced philosophy's hammer, are we still content to heed the iconoclast's call to break images? We should not forget that for Nietzsche, the hammer in question is nondestructive; it is a tool used not for smashing images but for making them resonate or "sound out": "regarding the sounding out of idols, this time they are not just idols of the age, but eternal idols, which are here touched with a hammer as with a tuning fork" (466). Nietzsche's hammer does not promise a world without images, much less a world in which imaging would be transparent. For Nietzsche, the idols are "eternal," meaning that there is no escape from images. What there is, instead, is a way of doing imaging differently.

While the "society of the spectacle" that Guy Debord describes has not ceased to accelerate in our own time, turning time and history into an image of exchange, and the image itself into an instrument of the market, I concur with T.J. Clark in arguing that "these are the circumstances in which it becomes a political act to show the kinds of critical thinking that

images can make possible" (185). For whether we are for or against seeing, the fact is that we moderns, after centuries of critique, remain saturated by images. Despite the widespread adoption of the iconoclast's hallowed logic to return to "things themselves" (Bacon 11), there is scarcely a science today—from the micro-level of neural imaging to the macro-level of Earth system science—that does not depend upon the ever-renewed effusion, intervention, and acceleration of images to legitimate its truth claims. What we need now is not philosophy's hammer but philosophy's tuning fork, that is to say, a different sense of the image. How might the Miltonic image with its "shifting phantasmagory" capacitate modes of perception equal to the task of thinking the image beyond the twilight of the idols?

Two attitudes to the image currently predominate: there is, as Pierre Hadot argues, the Promethean attitude, "which, by technical procedures, aims to tear Nature's secrets away from her, for utilitarian ends." On the other hand, there is the Orphic attitude, which "we might call naive perception, which uses only reasoning, imagination, and artistic discourse or activity to contemplate nature. [. . .] The Orphic attitude represents the secrets of nature [. . .] as the subjects of a progressive revelation" (95–96). Two senses of the image exist, then: the technical (Promethean) and the pre-technical (Orphic). Milton provides a third.

Against the Promethean desire to dominate nature, Milton relinquishes will-to-power, asking, "since God is light," "May I express thee unblamed?" (3.3). And against Orphic disinterestedness, Milton avowedly states: "With other notes than to the Orphean lyre / I sung of Chaos and eternal night" (3.17–18). Neither will-to-power nor a pre-technical phenomenology, Milton's "May I express" creates another image of modernity, not the image of lyric dismemberment, nor that of epic disenchantment. Milton's "May" ushers in a form of radical passivity, disabling the visual register and turning the speaker into little more than a photographic plate against which to reflect or "express" God's light. Here, expression does not come from within; it is not the inner light of spirit or man, as theorized by the Romantics,[22] but an anonymous and impersonal light, what Milton calls the "pure ethereal stream" (3.7). Milton's "May I express" points beyond the twilight of the idols by releasing the image to a different sensory economy, where it is not the subject who sees, but light or luminosity. Blinded by the light, the speaker begins to hear ("Or hear'st thou

rather") and feel ("And feel thou sovereign vital lamp") God's image (3.7, 22). And not without a supplemental prosthesis: for, as Eliot's simile suggests, Milton's poetry does more than just prefigure the "shifting phantasmagory" that Benjamin would make so central to his theory of modernity; it foregrounds the always already of the machine within perception itself. Deleuze's observation that the camera denatures the human eye in modern cinema thus finds an early instance in Milton's effort to make of his blindness an active prosthetic relay in the creation of images. From floral implants to luminescent assemblages, the eye of Milton's poetry is directly in things, blind but active.

Let us try then not to see clearly—to treat the Miltonic image not as an object of representation but as an experience of aberration: an image blurred. This would entail recognizing that images are less powerful than we think, that they are fragile, wanting, and indeed, "hollow," which "does not prevent them from being those in which people have the most faith" (Nietzsche 466). Second, it would entail shifting our general "mode of apprehension" (Eliot, "Milton" 199). Like the "shifting phantasmagory" of which Eliot writes, Eve's acoustic dream vision, "for I this night have dreamed, / *If* dreamed" (5.30–32, my emphasis), gives the body over to the autonomy of its parts and so releases the image to the delirium of night, in which every image, henceforth, is a disability image. A disability aesthetic that embraces wider modes of apprehension, that is both object-oriented and object-disoriented, does not just spell the end of ableist readings of Milton, but also suggests the broader importance of Milton's poetics for word-image studies.

Notes

1. I use the word 'arrest' here in the dual sense of 1) a stoppage of motion: Milton criticism has wanted to *stop* the "shifting phantasmagory" and to make Milton's imagery 'still' (as in a film still); and 2) a form of capture: critics have wanted to lay hold of the Miltonic image for visual ends. Against this form of stillness/capture, I take seriously Eliot's protestation not "to *see* very clearly any scene that Milton depicts" ("Milton" 199).

2. Benjamin's assertion that "image is dialectics at a standstill" proves the exception to this summary. For Benjamin, "image" refers to the "now" time of historical legibility; each image is "charged to the bursting point with time" (462–63).

3. On the reception and imitation of ancient Greek ekphrastic traditions by Renaissance writers, see Elizabeth B. Bearden.

4. According to Eliot, "Marvell also falls into the even commoner error of images which are over-developed or distracting; which support nothing but their own misshapen bodies" ("Andrew Marvell" 256). Eliot extends the language of disability beyond the identity coordinates of Milton's blindness to account for a "commoner error" among images. Insofar as Milton's extra-visual imagery can be traced to other early modern writers who were not blind, such as Marvell, the argument in favor of Milton's architectonic visual language becomes all the more important for reading early modern word-images more broadly.

5. Claire Colebrook defines *techne* as a logic of connection and notes that "seeing" (or the relay between image-movement-eye) is only one potential "path" in the actualization of life: "perception does not grasp or take in everything that is there to be seen by the eye," but rather "maximizes the efficiency of life" through a logic of supplementation. She continues, "A technology is therefore both a continuation of life *and* a loss of life, for without forgoing some paths and actualizing some potentials rather than others, life would not be able to go on living" (10–11).

6. Mitchell notes that efforts to determine the "meaning" and "power" of images (variously construed as what images do to the spectator) have been all but exhausted by hermeneutic and critical methodologies. What has yet to be reckoned with is "their silence": "We need to account for not just the power of images but their powerlessness, their impotence, their abjection" (*What Do Pictures Want?* 10). The question "What do images want?" would thus be a question of what images *desire*. I take Mitchell's understanding of desire here to be more Deleuzian inspired than Freudian-Lacanian, insofar as desire is described not as an expression of "lack" but as a process of assemblage (61–63). Milton's images similarly direct our attention to the more-than-visual surplus involved in any act of seeing. The visual weakness of his images is indicative of a powerlessness that would, in the end, characterize the entire field of visuality.

7. For an in-depth account of this particular critical tendency, see Daniel Shore.

8. My thinking on (non-)visuality draws on the recent efforts by Renaissance scholars (and some non-Renaissance scholars) to excavate an archive, a sensibility, and a mode of address at odds with hegemonic representations of vision in early modernity and late modernity. On touch and taste, see Elizabeth D. Harvey, Daniel Heller-Roazen, Jeffrey Masten, and Joe Moshenska. On audiovisuality, see Jacques Khalip. For work on smell, see Holly Dugan.

9. For a detailed account of the challenge to scopic regimes in twentieth-century French theory, see Martin Jay. For a related account centered on the early modern sensorium, see Patricia A. Cahill.

10. As Mark B.N. Hansen states in *New Philosophy for New Media*, it is in the bodily apprehension of the image, "the visual image above all, but also the auditory image and the tactile image, that digital information is rendered apprehensible" (11). While I agree with Hansen about the processual nature of images, I differ from him on two points: first, while Hansen stresses the newness of these developments, placing the bodily apprehension of the image under the aegis of the digital, I argue that Milton's images already force us into a zone of blind indistinction, or of imaging apprehension distinct from visual representation; second, unlike Hansen, I do not differentiate between technical and pre-technical (human) perception (6–8). The eye in my account is prosthetic.

11. For representative accounts of Milton's iconoclasm, see Barbara Lewalski ("Milton and Idolatry"), David Loewenstein, and Regina Mara Schwartz.

12. On this point, I draw on David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's seminal text, *Narrative Prosthesis*. I also draw on Marquard Smith and Joanne Mora, who take "the material and metaphorical registers of prosthesis" to refer to the ever-changing "historical and conceptual edges between 'the human' and the posthuman" (3). See also Vivian Sobchack's analysis of prosthesis and metaphor as well as David Wills's deconstructive study of the valences of the term prosthesis.

13. "I have already remarked," Eliot writes, "in a paper written some years ago, on Milton's weakness of visual observation, a weakness which I think was always present—the effect of his blindness may have been rather to strengthen the compensatory qualities than to increase a fault which was already present" ("Milton" 198).

14. By 1652 Milton's blindness had become total. This condition forced Milton to compose *Paradise Lost* orally and with the assistance of an amanuensis (most likely a family member) who would write, revise, and read back Milton's dictation. In her biography of Milton, Lewalski notes that Milton's youngest daughter "Deborah was evidently a competent writer," adding "there were reports that she served at times as Milton's amanuensis" (*The Life of John Milton* 407–08). This historical detail proves interesting when read in relation to Eve's dream vision at the end of Book 12, which renders Eve an amanuensis or secretary to God's secret will.

15. All quotations of *Paradise Lost* are taken from Milton, *The Major Works*.

16. See, for instance, Nigel Smith.

17. See Stephen M. Fallon, Rayna Kalas, Joanna Picciotto, and John Rogers.

18. In Levinas's ethical-religious formulation, "[v]ision [. . .] is a search for adequation; it is what par excellence absorbs being" (86–87). This is why "the best way of encountering the Other," Levinas writes, "is not even to notice the color of his eyes" (85).

19. This is to follow Derrida's reading of mnemotechnics in Freud's description of the "Mystic Writing Pad." See Derrida's "Freud and the Scene of Writing."

20. For a detailed account of the experience of touch in *Paradise Lost*, see Moshenska.

21. For an account of the overlap between secrecy and secretarial practice in the early modern period, see Richard Rambuss.

22. See M.H. Abrams.

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