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Art after Self Evidence: Fuseli, Blake, and Banks

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ABSTRACT
This article examines artworks by Henry Fuseli, William Blake, and Thomas Banks in relation to changing notions of "self evidence" at the turn of the nineteenth century. It considers how models of artistic neoclassicism and scientific experimental procedures shared an investment in the evidentiary authority of an idealized male body. Exploring the gendered and racial hierarchies operative in such an ideal, this article also charts its unraveling.

In or around 1802, Henry Fuseli made two sketches (including Figure 1) that diagram an unusual episode of spectatorship: an encounter between a contemporary female viewer and the central figure in the *Laocoön* Group. Her outstretched hands coiled into fists, the woman pulls back from the sculpted nude as if stunned by its appearance. Fuseli seems to play upon gendered accounts of sensibility, here manifested as a woman's exaggerated and perhaps sexualized response to a work of art. The "fine imagination" of women, after all, was invoked by newspapers when reporting of people experiencing physical or mental ailments upon visiting art exhibitions.[1] Admittedly, the sculpted body to which she responds is anything but straightforward. Fuseli omits not only Laocoön's hands and famously expressive face but also his two sons and the giant snake that entwines their bodies. And in contrast to the exclusion of such canonical details, Laocoön's torso, genitalia, and legs are vividly—even gratuitously—present.

A modernizing market for art and the rise of public exhibitions were transforming how spectators looked at and responded to artworks in European capitals such as London and Paris. But it is the artist's strange distortion of the communicative powers of the male nude that I wish to focus on, insofar as they allow us to think more expansively about embodied experience and the representation of bodies during this period.[2] Fuseli was exceptionally alert to the expressive capacities of the body, due in part to his involvement with the translation and illustration of the foremost treatise on physiognomy of the time. The multi-volume *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789–1798) was penned by the artist's childhood friend Johann Caspar Lavater.[3] Claiming to author a modern Enlightenment science of mankind, Lavater proposed that the exterior surface of the human body is an informational matrix from which knowledge of a person's character can be extracted (see Shortland). Fuseli's treatment of Laocoön excludes the body

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Figure 1. Henry Fuseli, "A Woman before the *Laocoön* II" 1801–1805. Pen and brown ink over pencil on paper. Kunsthaus Zürich. Photo: © Kunsthaus Zürich, Collection of Prints and Drawings.

parts most prized by Lavater as sources of information, such as the head, and lavishes attention on aspects of the body that are decidedly less instructive for the putative science of mankind. The artist inverts the informational hierarchy mapped onto the body by Lavater. In doing so the sketch raises larger questions about that body's evidentiary authority.[4] It signals, I believe, a deep skepticism about "self evidence," a concept that we can trace across a wide range of eighteenth-century European cultural activities from scientific methods to political rhetoric.

For historian of science Simon Schaffer, self evidence names the link between the private scientific experiment and the public nature of collective knowledge in Enlightenment Europe ("Self Evidence"). Schaffer refers specifically to experimental procedures in which direct observation through the human senses is a privileged tool of scientific inquiry. Rather than trust the authority of ancient texts, savants prized knowledge gained through experiments that could be witnessed by rational human observers.[5] While Schaffer describes a particular configuration within scientific experiments, historians have elsewhere spoken of eighteenth-century self evidence in a more general sense. For Michael Gaudio it designates an eighteenth-century belief in the legibility of nature to the human observer, which acquired specific political valences in colonial North America: "a republican dream of a society in which the character of each individual is rendered completely transparent to his peers" (6). More recently in the pages of this

journal, Andrew Dicus invokes "self-evidence" as a synonym for the logic of common sense deployed in the rhetoric of French Revolutionaries, who asserted the "obviousness" of their political claims as a persuasive strategy (200).

Taken in its broadest sense, self evidence acts as a useful shorthand for the evidentiary authority of the human body—the ability of the body to produce and authenticate various kinds of knowledge according to the terms of eighteenth-century empiricism (Budge 16; Law 131–64). This comprises both the embodied phenomenon of sensory perception and the visible appearance of human bodies as objects of study. Enlightenment self evidence never amounted to an absolute trust in the infallibility of the human senses, but it did inform a widespread set of assumptions about how the body reveals and communicates knowledge. It presupposed that (1) the perceptible aspects of the natural world reflect how the world "really is," and (2) the human body has approximately functional and approximately reliable access to the natural world through the senses. That this body was explicitly coded as white, European, genteel, and male—a point to which I will return—was key to its credibility. The female spectator in Fuseli's drawing was largely excluded from the procedures of self evidence.

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the evidentiary authority of the scientific body was in doubt. As scientific activities were increasingly codified, professionalized, and institutionalized, its practitioners "erased" (to borrow Lissa Roberts's word) direct bodily observation from many of their discipline's experimental procedures. "Unmediated sense evidence played less and less of a public role in the scientific determination of knowledge," Roberts writes, and scientists "increasingly subordinated their bodies to the material technology of their laboratories" (507). And while some sensational forms of scientific knowledge production survived into the Victorian era, it was largely, Iwan Rhys Morus notes, "written out of the book of knowledge" (389). Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have charted the emergence of a nineteenth-century scientific paradigm they call "objectivity," in which the selfhood of the scientist was understood to be an impediment to knowledge rather than a valuable instrument to wield. The practitioner was increasingly called upon to enact "self-discipline, self-restraint, self-abnegation, self-annihilation, and a multitude of other techniques of self-imposed selflessness" (*Objectivity* 203). Daston and Galison address selfhood rather than the human body, but their argument is one of many sites in which we find an Enlightenment model of self evidence unraveling in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Fuseli's pair of sketches might serve as another such site. Having traveled to Paris in 1802, the artist was probably reflecting on *Laocoön*'s recent installation in the Musée Napoléon rather than remembering it from his time living in Rome decades earlier (Gallo 113; Schiff 45). The sculptural group had been physically re-situated in a museum that boldly announced Napoleon's imperial ambitions, yet Fuseli ignores this in order to focus exclusively on an encounter between two bodies. The artist draws out the sexual subtext of this encounter through the graphic frontal presentation of the male body and the uncovered breasts of its female viewer (Pop "Sympathetic Spectators" 946; Jensen n.p.). The heroic male body is pointedly, almost excessively on display. But not in a way that communicates information about the classical narrative figured in the larger sculpture nor about moral virtues to which the viewer might aspire. The body does not disclose itself in fully perceptible terms, and it is encountered by a viewer who is not mobilizing her visual experience in pursuit of knowledge production. Rather than

being instructed or at least drawn into a state of aesthetic contemplation, the viewer Fuseli portrays is gripped by an intense psychic and physical experience at odds with the level-headed self-possession expected of the knowing spectator-subject.

Fuseli was no stranger to Enlightenment claims about the evidentiary powers of the human body. The artist collaborated with Lavater for over two decades on a set of physiognomic treatises which were widely read, abridged, translated, and copied in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Graham 62). Lavater's texts put forward what he believed to be a modern empirical science of analyzing the face and body of a person to determine their inner characteristics—a system Fuseli once called "the mother of correctness," despite having protracted disputes with Lavater that resulted in their eventual estrangement (Fuseli n.p.). The designs Fuseli produced for his compatriot's project never really *worked* according to the terms of Lavater's system (O'Rourke, *Art, Science, and the Body* 60–103). Instead, Fuseli's illustrations embraced forms of bodily exaggeration and pictorial obscurity that concealed the very features of the body Lavater subjected to physiognomic analysis, such as the profile of the face.

Perhaps it was William Blake who modeled most clearly what was at stake when he created a folio-sized engraving of a "Head of a Damned Soul in Dante's Inferno" (Figure 2) based on a physiognomic illustration by Fuseli *circa* 1789. When Blake produced his print, it had already been engraved in much sparser and smaller versions by at least two separate engravers for different editions of Lavater's *Physiognomy*. Only five proofs of Blake's large-scale image survive.[6] The print depicts a dramatically foreshortened head and neck, reined in only by a thin, fibrous skein of ink. The figure's head is cast backwards violently, exposing the tumescent, pulsating surface of this throat—an evocation of virility as well as a state of intense exposure. The flatter expanse of his neck rises upwards to meet the head, forming the slightest hint of an ear, the specter of a sense evoked only in its absence.

The figure's engorged lips are thrown open to reveal the fleshy cavern of his mouth, punctuated by a pair of ungainly teeth and a swollen tongue. The diagonal that grows from the base of the throat propels itself towards the bulbous tip of the figure's nose, a facial feature whose profile was taken by Lavater to be exceptionally articulate in physiognomic analysis. In lieu of a communicative profile, we see a nose greatly distorted through foreshortening that highlights the dark blankness of two nostrils. Above, a swirling mass of hair disperses into a web of quivering lines that advance, with varying degrees of intensity, towards the margins of the page. Perhaps the most curious feature of this image is the way in which the eyes, appearing as if they have begun to slip away from this diagonal vector, are rent open. Lacking lid, pupil, or iris, the eyes are denoted by an undifferentiated bright surface. The eye on the right is the only part of the image that is not enlaced in a network of engraved lines, bearing just the faintest shadow of anatomy on the uppermost edge. Insofar as the eyes constitute the brightest part of the image, they are the most visible to us as viewers—but their blankness also signals the figure's blindness, his inability to participate in a reciprocal field of vision through which one could come to know the world.

Removed by a degree from Lavater's project of physiognomy, Blake's large print delivers something broadly analogous to Fuseli's portrayal of *Laocoön* several years later: an intricately detailed bodily surface, yet one that does not communicate the kinds of information one would expect of it. Blake couples this with allusions to sensory failure. Ears,

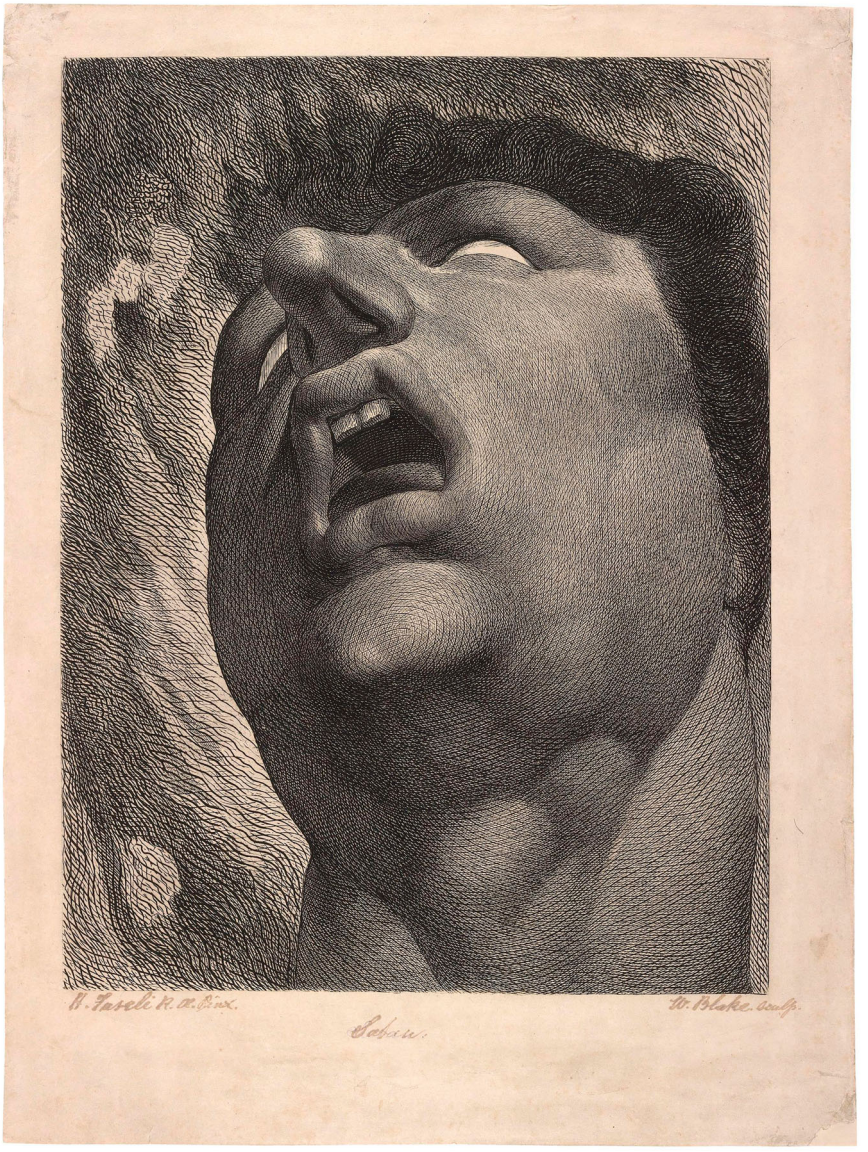

Figure 2. William Blake after Henry Fuseli, "Satan" circa 1790. Etching and engraving. The Morgan Library. Photo: © The Morgan Library.

eyes, mouth, and even nose are portrayed as absent, blank, or obscured in the print. To the extent that Fuseli's illustrations for *Essays on Physiognomy* never fully accorded with the scientific aims of Lavater's system, in Blake we find something even further estranged from the notion that the body can act as a communicative matrix. Blake shows us neither a body capable of producing evidence about itself, nor a self who has secure perceptual access to the world around them. This was not the only time Blake would invoke blindness as an emblem of the profound limitations of sensory experience, especially within the empiricist frameworks of which Blake was notoriously critical (Larrissy 64–88).

In the print we find Blake collaborating with Fuseli to create an image in which perception—especially visual perception—does not furnish knowledge. They portray the very thing missing from Fuseli's sketch of *Laocoön*, the head, and yet they still disrupt that head's ability to produce knowledge through the intense distortion of its features. At the same time, they evoke the subject position of one whose sensory capacities register as forms of blankness. This is a figure lacking perceptual access to the world (and thereby denied empirical apprehension) who simultaneously presents little or no physiognomic information to others.

Blake and Fuseli were hardly alone in producing artworks whose portrayal of the human body—and above all the male nude—challenged the viewer in new ways. Thomas Banks, James Northcote, and John Flaxman were among those who, inspired in no small measure by the monumental nudes of Renaissance and Mannerist artists, were experimenting with the limitations of bodily intelligibility and human sightedness around the turn of the nineteenth century. Few artworks capture the declining power of the heroic male nude more vividly than Banks's sculpted portrayal of *The Falling Titan* (Figure 3). Banks establishes a graphic equivalence between narrative failure and the overpowering of a classical body; here, a titan is cast down from Olympus after failing to defeat Zeus, his overturned body cantilevered off the central axis of the sculpture. If sculptural engagements with materiality, exemplified in the *non finito* of Michelangelo,

Figure 3. Thomas Banks, *The Falling Titan*, 1786. Marble. Royal Academy of Arts. Photo: © Royal Academy of Arts, London. Photographer: Paul Highnam.

often hinged on the artist's heroic wresting of smoothed delicate forms out of obdurate rock, Banks envisions the rock's revenge (Bell and Lawrence 69). Its roughened mass is poised just above the labored softness of the titan's muscles, suspended in the moment before it crushes the body Banks has so painstakingly carved out of its depths.

The Falling Titan enables us to reckon with a more expansive sense of self evidence and its bearing on a system of aesthetic values invested in the expressive capacities of the idealized male nude. In the second half of the eighteenth century, neoclassicism had become synonymous with the highest form of artistic creation in Europe's art academies. Although its conceptual and temporal boundaries are inexact, it entailed a renewed interest in the culture of Greco-Roman antiquity coupled with a formal emphasis on balance, clarity, and *disegno*. Through an appeal to neoclassical principles, figures like the Royal Academy president Joshua Reynolds argued, art could claim a specific moral function: to convey timeless ideals and civic virtues to contemporary viewers.[7] In the mid-eighteenth century, German historian and archaeologist Johann Winckelmann had influentially argued that the idealized Greek male nude was the ultimate expression of the ethical and political virtues of the civilization that produced it (see Potts 145–80; Davis 23–50). Consequently the human body was widely taken to be the preeminent pictorial vehicle for communicating such virtues. Even though the politically radical Banks and the more reactionary Reynolds were using the body to convey different things, both artists treated the classical male nude as a privileged communicative medium. The results were diverse, and Cora Gilroy-Ware has recently stressed the plural meanings that could attach to the classical body. Yet this itself underscores how even those with very different aims and priorities employed a common pictorial vocabulary anchored in the significatory powers of the idealized nude.

Academic neoclassicism, in other words, shared with scientific procedures a baseline assumption that the white male body was an authoritative vehicle for truth—whether these be the moral truths of civic humanism or the empirical truths of scientific experimentation. In *The Falling Titan*, we can recognize not only an intensely sensuous rather than virtuous version of this body but also a meditation on the limitations of such a body. Banks's titan is far less perceptually elusive than the examples by Fuseli and Blake discussed thus far.[8] The full extent of the body is available to be seen, with the titan's anguished facial expression blocked by his arm but coming into view as one walks around the sculpture. The general narrative framework was likewise accessible to an informed viewer in late eighteenth-century Britain. That such a work was conceived for public presentation in Britain's prestigious Royal Academy is surely relevant to its enhanced clarity and legibility. Equally remarkable, though, is the intense downward torquing to which an ostensibly heroic body is subjected and the resulting dramatic exposure of his broad torso. The un-polished blocky marble of the boulders poised above him threatens to reabsorb the smoothed musculature of his body; our idealized male nude is on the verge of returning to a state of formless or de-formed materiality. The titan's physical and aesthetic perfection, far from guaranteeing his success, have been refigured as a form of intense exposure and a signal of his imminent failure.

We tend to view these vulnerable male bodies as a weathervane, of sorts, for sweeping social changes taking place across Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century. The ascent of a consumer society, the rise of industrialization, and new forms of social mobility have been critical to how we understand this moment in British art.[9] In the final

decades of the eighteenth century, the American Revolution, French Revolution, and Haitian Revolution had also revealed the shocking extent to which the British imperial project was both fragile and morally compromised. Heroic male bodies—it is thought—did not seem readily available to British artists when traditional models of heroic masculinity were themselves in crisis. The sensory capacities and practices of the viewing subject were likewise being reconfigured: spectators interfaced with increasingly sophisticated forms of technology-driven illusion and their perceptual engagement with the world was regarded as variable and contingent rather than stable and universal (Bermingham 395; Crary 97–136; Klonk 3–10).

The social hierarchies that regulated scientific experiments, aligned with those that informed the artistic ideals of academic neoclassicism, came under enormous pressure in the final decades of the eighteenth century. A crucial but underexamined part of this, I am suggesting, is what these changes meant for the evidentiary capacity of the human body—both the body as an object of vision and the body as the locus of visual and psychic experience.[10] It is from this vantage point that I propose we read artworks by Fuseli, Blake, and Banks—not just as allegories about the significatory status of the male body in elite visual culture but as a set of artistic responses to an untethering of self and evidence, and a weakening of the ties through which human subjects were thought to make sense of the perceptible world. But which bodies? Whose evidence? The universalizing aspirations of both academic neoclassicism and Enlightenment empirical procedures were rooted in a vision of the body to which few could lay claim.[11] Class and gender were among the key categories used to police who could produce scientific knowledge in Enlightenment Europe.[12]

We have already seen one such example in Fuseli's pair of drawings portraying an encounter between a viewing subject and an artwork. The authority to create and communicate truth, however tenuous it may have been, was only ever accorded to bodies coded as white, male, European, and genteel. That Fuseli portrays a woman recoiling in shock rather than responding with calm intellectual reflection exemplifies one of the reasons why women's bodies were not privileged in the production of scientific knowledge. Women's bodies were thought to be too sensitive, too easily tricked, and too susceptible to nervous disorders (Mullan 152–53; Schaffer, "Experimenters' Techniques" 459). Like domestic servants and non-property-owning men, women "could not sufficiently discriminate their bodies' responses from illusions" according to the terms of eighteenth-century scientific discourse (Schaffer, "Experimenters' Techniques" 459). Although women (typically female relatives), domestic staff, and lower-class men are known to have routinely participated in and assisted with scientific experiments, this was ratified under the sign of elite male authority.[13] Female spectators were regarded with a similar distrust in prominent aesthetic theories, particularly in relation to sensibility as a form of non-rational or excessive responsiveness to stimuli.[14] Consequently they were among the social groups deemed incapable of experiencing "aesthetic disinterestedness" according to Adam Smith, Reynolds, and other influential thinkers (Mattick 53). Of course, this is not to say that it was widely believed all white genteel men in all circumstances were capable of aesthetic experience that was rational and broadly aligned with the procedures of empirical knowledge production. But Fuseli's drawing supplies a useful shorthand for precisely why the female body was largely excluded from those procedures.

Neoclassicism's investment in the whiteness of marble for portraying ideal bodies, on full display in *Falling Titan*, was staged in relation to another form of exclusion that was core to European social hierarchies (Nelson 57–72). Self evidence was premised on the unique truth-telling powers of the white body during a period in which British prosperity relied upon the enforced labor of bodies it was at pains to define as "non-white."[15] This tension surfaces powerfully in the print "The Negro Revenged," by Abraham Raimbach, based on a design by Fuseli to illustrate a collection of poems by William Cowper (Figure 4). The engraving was made to accompany Cowper's popular abolition ballad, "The Negro's Complaint," composed in 1788, in which the poet reflected upon Britain's participation in the slave trade. Through direct address, Cowper transports the presence and voice of an enslaved African from a distant plantation into the drawing rooms and coffee houses of cosmopolitan London, explicitly naming England's role in chattel slavery. "Men from England bought and sold me," the ballad reads, although the speaker remains "in thought as free as ever" (Cowper lines 5, 10). The materiality of Fuseli's print—its pictorial articulation in and through the contrasting of black ink and white paper—was well-suited to Cowper's text, whose speaker announces that "skins may differ, but affection / Dwells in white and black the same" (15–16). Difference resolves into sameness as if through the dialectical invocation of "white and black" in Cowper's verse. It is the ballad's closing lines that are illustrated by Fuseli and Raimbach, which voice a theory already circulating among abolitionists that the tropical storms, shipwrecks, and other natural disasters which plagued Caribbean plantations manifested God's disapproval of enslavement. Divine intervention is pictured in the form of a lightning bolt which strikes down a ship presumably involved in the slave trade in the lower left portion of the print. Above it, a dark-skinned heroic male figure and a female companion raise their arms in defiance as they witness this act of moral retribution.

By 1807, Fuseli's collaboration with Lavater had come to an end after many years of conflict. But Lavaterian physiognomy had specific and vivid implications for the debates surrounding abolition. First of all, Lavater's proposition would be widely taken up by subsequent theories of "racial science": namely that the perceptible traits of the human body reveal mental characteristics such as temperament and intelligence.[16] On this basis, comparative anatomists would subsequently claim that the outward appearance of an enslaved person denoted inferiority of mind and justified their enslavement.[17] A second, related link resides in Lavater's appeals to the scientific objectivity of measuring and analyzing the human head. The putative "natural alterity" of the Black African, Andrew S. Curran writes, "provided a coherent concept around which the first 'scientifically based' human classification schemes were organized; and, most infamously, it replaced the theological and even economic justifications as the most compelling rationale for African chattel slavery" (168). That this could be rooted in quantitative measurements of the head was key to its claims to scientific legitimacy. So, although Lavater's text predated the theories of scientific racism that thrived in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, his larger project was a key progenitor of the rationale upon which it was based.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, an *embodied* notion of racial difference was ascendant. In 1799 the British physician Charles White published *Accounts of the Regular Gradation in Man and in Different Animals and Vegetables*, which claimed that Africans were biologically inferior to Europeans. Even though White would argue

Figure 4. Abraham Raimbach after Henry Fuseli, "The Negro Revenged," 1807. In *Poems by William Cowper* vol. I (London: J. Darcy, 1808). Etching and engraving. Royal Academy of Arts. Photo: © Royal Academy of Arts, London.

against enslavement, his text was an important step towards a biological conception of race that located racial identity within the individual human body and increasingly understood it as an intrinsic set of traits rather than an adaptive response to climate and environment.[18] Petrus Camper and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach were among those advocating for a taxonomic approach to head shape in which Black Africans were compared unfavorably with contemporary Europeans as well as the sculpted heads of Greco-Roman antiquity. Consequently, we encounter a system in which racial identity is both profoundly embodied *and* radically visible. Race, to borrow the words of Anne Lafont, "was thus conceptualized as manifested in reliable and legible corporeal signs, revealing itself to sight independently of its bearer's will" ("How Skin Color" 95). Lafont's words might appear to locate us squarely within a paradigm of self evidence, in which the perceptible appearance of the body is taken to articulate scientific truths. Crucially, though, in this formulation the only truth the Black body can articulate is its Blackness. Moreover, evidence only worked in one direction: the bodies manifested truths to others in disclosing their position within systems of racial classification, but they were not regarded as reliable perceptual instruments in the pursuit of scientific truth.

Fuseli's print diverged sharply from the abolitionist imagery that had been circulating since the founding of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787. Its seal, which was widely reproduced in the years that followed, portrayed a Black man in a supplicating pose, his arms still bearing shackles while he entreats the (implicitly white) viewer to recognize him as "a man and a brother." Here, too, the contrastive play of black and white coloring gave force to the abolitionist message it encoded, for racial hierarchies were progressively being understood as and figured through skin color ("How Skin Color" 108–10; Fend 200–02). Fuseli's inclusion on the margin of the print of a cloaked figure who looks up at the central pairing could potentially read, in this context, as a concession to viewers expecting to see a Black figure depicted as passive and subordinate. Yet the print's protagonist is rendered in the pictorial language of the heroic, monumental, idealized male nude. His refined yet prominent musculature and his empowered pose speak to a subject of dignity, righteousness, and strength. Of course, Fuseli still sets him apart from a European neoclassical ideal through not only the darkened skin but also the gold hoop earring and the rudimentary drapery that conceals his partial nudity. Even that nudity could have signified differently when attributed to a Black figure, taken by some viewers as an allusion to savagery rather than nobility. And while Fuseli conceals the protagonist's facial profile—withholding the cranial vertices which would allow a viewer to locate it within Camper's racial taxonomy of skull shapes—he supplies the profile of the inactive cloaked figure who sits in the foreground. Displaying the profile maximizes the perceptible indexes of the body that disclosed its Blackness, "independently of its bearer's will," to recall Lafont. Making the Black body fully legible in this manner risks installing it within power relations and moral systems which justified that body's enslavement.

Fuseli's intellectual circle in London was pointedly liberal and the artist's close friend and biographer John Knowles insisted that "no man had a deeper horror of the slave trade" (376). Yet as Angela Rosenthal and more recently Andrei Pop have pointed out, Fuseli was "complexly implicated in the economy of slavery" like many of his peers, whose works sometimes reflected and participated in colonialist ways of thinking and

related ideas about racial difference (Rosenthal, "Bad Dreams" 118; Pop, "Importance" 62–64 and 77–79). His illustration for Cowper's ballad seems to affirm his support for abolitionism, although we can weigh this against his reluctant but long-term efforts to help Lavaterian physiognomy reach a wide European audience. In Fuseli's print the agency of moral repudiation is displaced onto a non-human actor, the lightning bolt; the human figures are spectators of rather than participants in their liberation. The act of witnessing has been drained of the kind of agential authority it possessed within a paradigm of self evidence, and the body's disclosure of its perceptible features coincides with its racialization.

Fuseli's print and the subsequent painting he executed of the same subject (*The Negro Avenged*, 1806–1807, Kunsthalle, Hamburg) serve as an important point of contact between eighteenth-century scientific theories of racial difference and artistic neoclassicism. As Lafont (*L'Art et la race* 93–128) and David Bindman have argued, the aesthetic principles of neoclassicism had specific implications for the articulation of race in other knowledge systems. Neoclassicism co-evolved with the emergence of racial anthropology, and its articulation of what constitutes an "ideal" body capable of conveying universal truths was emphatically white and European at the very moment that European powers were profiting from the exploitation and enslavement of people who did not physically resemble this putative ideal. Fuseli's painting was produced roughly contemporaneously with the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which prohibited the slave trade in the British Empire although, crucially, it did not abolish the practice of enslavement. Portraying the speaker of Cowper's ballad through the pictorial language of the idealized, heroic male nude, Fuseli reveals that ideal to be more variable than otherwise assumed.

But it also affirms the delimited truth claims to which a Black body could aspire—namely, to the conditions of its enslavement—in both formal and narrative terms. The mere density of ink necessary to convey darkened skin color is articulated through the traditional dot-and-lozenge technique, in which the enlaced, intersecting lines carved by the engraver's burin produce tiny, diamond-shaped spaces which are then filled with a stand-alone dot. By sheer dint of medium, the engraving Abraham Raimbach produced based on Fuseli's design articulated Black skin through a tight mesh of lines and dots, a veil of sorts that would have required both skill and significant time to cut into the metal plate. It stands in sharp contrast with the animate, uncoiled frenzy of engraved marks through which Blake pictured Fuseli's Satan, even though Blake called upon the same technique. The condition of visibility for the enslaved protagonist is, in a sense, his containment within a disciplined network of lines and dots.

In the decades that followed, a logic of corporeal suspicion came to displace self evidence. If the human species was not homogeneous, as many comparative anatomists would go on to claim, the link between bodily experience and universal truth was not a given. The private body could only act as a privileged source of empirical knowledge if that body was white, male, and genteel. Consequently we are dealing with a knowledge system that was itself a product and an expression of colonial power. It impels us to recognize how "coloniality of knowledge" was operative in self evidence, to draw upon a concept developed by Aníbal Quijano (169). The extremely narrow parameters of scientific knowledge production devalued the evidentiary authority of experience when that experience belonged to people who did not meet its criteria—criteria that grew out of and reinforced the racial hierarchies used to justify the practice of chattel slavery from

which Britain still profited and the larger apparatus of European settler colonialism. The "self" of self evidence was an exceptionally narrow category whose exclusions and omissions were coming under mounting criticism. There were other external pressures in play, such as calls for more expansive political enfranchisement among non-property-owning men in places such as France and Britain, and the growing cultural presence of figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, who were advocating for the rights of women. My point here is not that abolitionism, suffrage movements, or emergent feminist literature brought about the decline of self evidence. But they certainly made it more difficult to posit the self evident body as a universal and stable category.

Internal pressures, too, had long been at work undermining the procedures of self evidence. For example, scientific inquiries into phenomena such as electricity called into question the body's ability to react appropriately to experimental phenomena. Self-experimentation in particular revealed the limitations of a mode of inquiry in which some aspects of sensational experience could be trusted and others could not (Strickland 454). In the case of electricity, I have argued elsewhere, "being shocked" was not a state that was compatible with the operations of self evidence ("Girodet's Galvanized Bodies" 878–81). As a scientific instrument the body was regarded with growing skepticism and new fields were subjecting the body's intimate functions to analysis. For Michel Foucault, this marked the "birth of the clinic" in European medicine (*Birth of the Clinic*). The body's perceptual mechanisms were increasingly recognized as physiological processes to be studied rather than treated as tools through which the material world could be reliably, perfectly, and universally apprehended.[19] There were wide-ranging changes afoot in the cultural landscape of western Europe that dismantled a system in which the idealized white male body served as the ultimate means through which to produce and communicate knowledge. Fuseli, Banks, and Blake were among those working in the wreckage of such a system in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—a moment in which it became possible to explore different kinds of embodied and perceptual modalities. We must see, in their art, a provocation and a question: what comes after self evidence?

Notes

1. Noted in a loose clipping from May 1781 held in the Royal Academy Archives CR/1 1: 101.
2. This text was inspired in part by material first consolidated in Stafford. A brief but provocative earlier attempt to bring these together is Todd. For a discussion of this scientific context in relation to different artworks, see O'Rourke, *Art, Science, and the Body in Early Romanticism*.
3. Dates are given for the major English translation, which was based on a significantly expanded French edition rather than the original German text.
4. See Wolfe and Gal. Further scholarship includes Riskin, O'Neal, and Packham. Outram has identified this as part of a more pervasive state of affairs, arguing that eighteenth-century individuals "viewed the body as the producer of knowledge for its owner. Knowledge was not simply that which subjugated the body into conformity with the social and political order; it was also produced by the body itself in its function as the primary decoder of sense impressions" (20–21).
5. Coppola discusses the performative aspects of this. See also Daston and Lunbeck 81–114, 117–34, and 185–205; Lilte 260–72; and Riskin.
6. See Erle. It has been speculated that Blake produced the engraving largely as an experiment for the amusement of Fuseli.

7. See Barrell 69–162. However it would be a mistake to assume that Reynolds adhered to the strictest view of these principles. As scholars have shown, he was a figure of great subtlety, innovation, and experimentation. See Hallett, Hunter, and Postle.
8. While studying together in Rome, Fuseli and Banks were known to have played a "five-point game," in which one person placed five dots on a piece of paper and the other sketched a body whose head and limbs aligned with each point (Myrone, *Henry Fuseli* 28, 29).
9. This understanding has been guided by the scholarship of Solkin, Bindman, Myrone's *Body-building*, and others.
10. Here we might make contact with related scholarship from literary historians including D'Arcy Wood and Otto.
11. Although this idea is not unique to Schaffer's scholarship, he has coined a useful phrase, terming the elite social parameters of this configuration the "cartesianism of the genteel" ("Self Evidence" 339).
12. This is a well-established point, remarked upon in Shapin and Schaffer but also found in older texts such as Mulkay.
13. Women's participation in scientific experiments was limited to domestic spaces and was not granted institutional recognition from eighteenth-century European scientific academies. Some famous examples include Maria Margarethe Kirch, Hélène Dumoustier, and Marie-Anne Lavoisier (see Fara).
14. Literature on this subject is extensive. For an overview see Goring. Castle and Pop's "Sympathetic" are among those who connect these ideas explicitly to Fuseli.
15. On how art staged whiteness in relation to moral virtues, see Rosenthal's "*Visceral* Culture."
16. Although rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scientific racism is very much with us today (see Saini).
17. See Augstein, Schiebinger, and Wheeler.
18. On the larger arc of these ideas, see Hudson and Stepan.
19. This has a much larger history, but the relationship between sensation, cognition, and literary romanticism has been elucidated by Richardson.

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