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About this Hypertext

This volume of the Romantic Circles Praxis Series (RCPS) is a dialogue designed as a multi-linked site and organized around a constellation of *topoi*, each with its own icon. It is part of the "Cameo Series" within RCPS, which features interviews with prominent Romanticists. Previous "Cameo" volumes include an interview with W. J. T. Mitchell by Orrin N. C. Wang. Please see the editor's prefatory note for more information about the interview format.

The text is encoded in HTML 4.01 Transitional according to the World Wide Web Consortium standards, featuring no frames and a limited use of tables. The sound files on this site are in .mp3 format. The site will work best with Netscape 4.0 or Internet Explorer 4.0 or higher or a comparable browser; earlier browsers may not display everything properly. Because you may enter and exit these files along multiple paths, you may need to use the back-arrow button on your browser to return to your starting point. The full text of the volume, like all hypertexts in the Romantic Circles Praxis Series, is fully searchable.

The essays and other files were marked up in HTML by Lisa Marie Rhody at the University of Maryland. The volume cover and contents page were also designed and marked up by Lisa Marie Rhody. The sound files have been recorded by Steve Newman.

About the Romantic Circles Praxis Series

The Romantic Circles Praxis Series is devoted to using computer technologies for the contemporary critical investigation of the languages, cultures, histories, and theories of Romanticism. Tracking the circulation of Romanticism within these interrelated domains of knowledge, RCPS recognizes as its conceptual terrain a world where Romanticism has, on the one hand, dissolved as a period and an idea into a plurality of discourses and, on the other, retained a vigorous, recognizable hold on the intellectual and theoretical discussions of today. RCPS is committed to mapping out this terrain with the best and most exciting critical writing of contemporary Romanticist scholarship. The Romantic Circles Praxis Series was formerly known as Romantic Praxis: Theory and Criticism. The name was changed in November 1999.

About the Contributor

Steve Newman is an Assistant Professor of English at Temple University. He is currently working on revising his dissertation on ballad collection and the institution of literature in Great Britain during the Long Eighteenth Century. An article adapted from that effort, on Allan Ramsay, lyric, and the origins of the Scottish Enlightenment is forthcoming in *Modern Language Quarterly*. He is also working on projects on personal statements for medical school and the relationship between undergraduate writing instruction and professional desire and on Robert Burns' self-presentation.

Prefatory Note

Steve Newman, Temple University

I have designed this dialogue as a multi-linked site organized around a constellation of *topoi*, each with its own icon. In addition to concretizing the dialogue's overarching theme of "the commonplace," this plan serves a couple of other purposes. The first is flexibility, giving the reader the option of moving straight through the interview or jumping from site to site (cite to cite). This approach also seeks to mirror the associational method of Professor Christensen's work: On the first page of his first book, he acknowledges his faith that by "relatively necessary train of associations, one could get from the *Preface of Observations on Man* to a conclusion on Coleridge's prose." My hope is that this dialogue can give a similar sense of movement, somewhere between the necessity of deduction and the happy surprise of good conversation. The text itself is a substantially revised transcript of a dialogue that took place in June of 1999.

I would like to thank the group of graduate students at the University of Maryland-College Park and Johns Hopkins who gave me feedback on these questions, especially Anne Frey and Daniela Garofalo; Keely McCarthy; Elizabeth Leatherbury, for photographing the Getty Museum; for tireless help with design, Mike Duvall and especially Lisa Marie Rhody; Neil Fraistat and Orrin Wang for commissioning the interview; and, of course, Professor Christensen, for agreeing to be interviewed--S. N.

Note

commonplace (n.): With the ancient rhetoricians: A passage of general application, such as may serve as the basis of an argument.— *Oxford English Dictionary*

Even though the commonplace is something we've all heard before, there is nothing nostalgic about its assertion; the commonplace is not a recollection that belongs to Byron, whether house or heart, but an address that finds its respondent in anyone who claims the right to answer. . . . words that matter inevitably, though not invariably, words that matter for each man and woman, though not for all humanity.—Jerome Christensen, *Lord Byron's Strength*

Finding Romantic Commonplaces: An Interview With Jerome Christensen

Site One: A Romantic Education

Steve Newman, Temple University



Johns Hopkins Seminar Room

1. **Steve Newman:** So I thought we'd start with a blurry picture of the seminar room at Hopkins. That image seems fitting because it's where I first made your acquaintance, a place we've both since departed but one that had an important impact on both of us. My first question is, "How did you get there?" Basically, what I'm asking for is a brief intellectual autobiography of how you came to be a professor of Romanticism and co-founder of the Film and Media Studies Program and the Center for Digital Media Research and Development.
2. The blurriness of the image is in fact a result of my using a subpar camera, but let's re-describe that flaw as a happy accident, since it points to your own skepticism as a rhetorical critic about the historicist's faith in the picturability of the past. It consequently complements the empty space where your silhouette would be if we had followed the practice set by Orrin Wang in his [interview with W. J. T. Mitchell](#) — which provided a visual pun of the cameo series. I decided to break that very short tradition as a way of pointing to the position you occupied when I first came to Hopkins and to announce some themes I'll be returning to over the course of our discussion.
3. I want to couch the question "How did you get there?" by drawing on some terms you introduced in an essay entitled, "From Rhetoric to Corporate Populism: A Romantic Critique of the Academy in an Age of High Gossip."¹ In that essay, you trace two basic ways of being initiated into a way of knowing — or perhaps an ethics of knowledge would be more accurate — "seduction" and "recruitment." So were you seduced or recruited into Romanticism? And by whom or what? I'm thinking particularly of the early part of your Romantic education up to *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language*.²
4. **Jerome Christensen:** I was a political science major at college. I was baffled by the New Criticism as it was applied in my lit courses (I learned the word "Alexandrine" in order to describe its enigmatic protocols), sunk as a prospective English major by a disastrous attempt at a close reading of Spenser. I eventually learned how to analyze art by watching moving pictures in a film course. At the end of my undergraduate career, I began to think I could learn how to read literature. But it was too late to learn anything. Although it was the heyday of formalism in the classrooms in the late 60s, it was a carnival of political demonstrations outside whether in the quad or on the Mall in D.C. Many of my classes senior year looked as empty as this seminar room.
5. That you mention Stanley Fish is interesting, because a summer course I took with him at Berkeley, during a year pretty much away from the academy, was a pivotal moment in my career. In fact, I would say that Stanley was the first person who really taught me to read, to address in a systematic way what reading is by situating reading within a rhetorical context. He was at that time teaching what I think was the last iteration of the lectures that became *The Self-Consuming Artifact*. The title of my first book, *The Blessed Machine of Language*, was meant to echo the title of Fish's book. After a year at Illinois I left for Cornell. I went there to study with Abrams and quickly became impressed with how

unlikely it was that I was ever going to achieve the scholarly stature that Abrams commanded so effortlessly and with such modesty. I was lucky enough to take a course on the sublime with Neil Hertz, where I was introduced to Derrida, along with Rousseau, Sade, Wordsworth. That course was the *unum necessarium* of my graduate career. And it was from there that I began reading *De la Grammatologie* just before Spivak's translation came out. My French is only a little more fluent for me on the page than it is off my tongue, but it was worth the labor.

6. Reading Derrida in the eighteenth-century context was like finding a subterranean treasure, because in fact most of the responses to Derrida at the time had focussed on his relation to structuralism. The section of *De La Grammatologie* that mattered was the deconstruction of Levi-Strauss's *Triste Tropique*. But for me Derrida's engagement with Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses* made sense of Romanticism in a fundamentally different way.
7. **SN:** What kind of resistance did you encounter, if any, from, say, someone like Abrams, who later on his career has published attacks on what he feels to be the excesses of the criticism that dates from the rise of post-structuralism? How did you negotiate any resistance you might have come up against?
8. **JC:** If you're asking was Mike Abrams's later work a disguised attack on me, the answer is. . .
9. **SN:** (laughing) No. . .
10. **JC:** (laughing) The answer is as much I'd like to think so, I regretfully doubt it. On the one hand, there is no more tolerant, and the word that's always used, it's *his* word—"genial"—scholar, critic, and teacher than Mike Abrams. On the other hand, he left no doubt that his views were fundamentally opposed to those of Derrida and de Man.
11. As much importance as *De la Grammatologie* had, the other book of fundamental formative or deformative importance in my career was the *Biographia Literaria* which was taught as a text for a semester-long seminar by Abrams. I remember an occasion when I had to present "The Rhetoric of Temporality," de Man's great essay, to the seminar. It was my first engagement with theory as opposed to something that would call itself criticism. I can say that after at least five readings, I was not sure that I understood a word of it. I finally worked through to what was no more than a paraphrase and someone irritably remarked (the accent was English, I recall), "Well, this is just nonsense! The man can't write. Why are we wasting our time?" And Abrams, to his eternal credit turned to the carper and said, "What makes you think that you don't need difficult language for difficult ideas?" And this in the context of a thorough critique of de Man's essay. The margin for independent thinking that Abrams opened for his students was very productive for me.
12. **SN:** This brings up one of the interesting things about your work, and you announced it in the early review in *Diacritics*³ on the sublime. My sense is that you have never been drawn to the sublime or nature or subject-object relations in general as a topic. Questions of mind seem to occupy you, among them how the self is to hold together given the ruptures that inhere in language, but not in the same way as for Hartman and those who followed the more phenomenologically-oriented paths of post-structuralism. So, why "writing" and not "nature" or "death"?
13. **JC:** At Cornell, I was able to orient myself by embracing the mystification that the eighteenth century stood for History and the Romantic era for Literature. I was allowed a license to make use of that figurative divide in my work. So Warburton looked like a ground from which one could produce figurative elaborations that would be literary counterstatements to that attempt at producing conceptual totality. Hartley worked the same way for me. What you learned from reading Warburton and Derrida was to look for those moments in which something like History or the historical emerged as an

irresistible trope within a text that was otherwise dedicated to a completely synchronic reading of the nature of things—

14. [Editor's note: At this moment, we heard the distinct whistle of a bird, a cuckoo no less, from the clock in Prof. Christensen's office, one of those clocks that emits a different birdsong every hour. This made both of us laugh.]
15. **SN**: There's history now!
16. **JC**: It's warbling its woodnotes wild. . . [both start laughing again as the song continues.]
17. **SN**: I hope the tape picks that up. . .
18. **JC**: Neil Hertz once told a seminar that according to Leo Spitzer there were just two ways to read a text — to look for the thing that is repeated constantly or look for that thing that is never repeated. And those historical moments are the eruption of that origin, the origin here being the origin of writing, with Warburton positing it in some place in Egypt with a priest carving hieroglyphs in a tomb or, in Hartley, Moses receiving the commandments in stone on Mount Sinai — unrepeatably, unique moments in those texts — unrepeatably, unique moments that, uncannily, were repeated again and again.
19. There were very few jobs in the mid-70s—about the same as the late 90s. Getting a job seemed like a statistical accident. The buyers' market and the advent of post-structuralism placed a premium on being able to perform theory moves, even if, apart from high structuralism, there wasn't really anything out there systematic enough to call theory as yet. There were people at Yale, Hopkins, and Cornell who had access to primary French texts or who had studied with or worked closely with French philosophers and critics. *Diacritics* was an important vehicle for the importation of that kind of criticism.
20. My criticism is theoretically informed. But I've never been a theorist—at most a method theorist. I learned a technique for performing theory in the service of critical argument. For a self-confessed rhetorician, it was opportune to be able to discover what looked like a new trope and irresistible to imitate the Derridean style. I had been primed for this by Stanley Fish, by having learned to read for tropes. "*Différance*" looked like the first post-classical trope — and arguably a romantic trope because it could be articulated so effectively with the scenario of the sublime and with the taste for the incommensurable.
21. Doubtless, deconstructive reading—reading for instances of *différance* across an array of texts, reading texts as occasions for the operation of *différance* — was sophisticated, artful rather than truthful, the exercise of talent rather than the unfolding of wisdom. At least I had no doubt it was: my Coleridge book featured his hyperbolic attack on the sophists as invitation to and commentary on the deconstructive enterprise in which I was engaged. And I do mean "enterprise," for if deconstruction, like sophistry, could claim to be value neutral, it was certainly not market indifferent. To abandon the goal of truth (if not the path of "rigor") entailed the recognition that one taught for money. And that recognition was the prelude to a more historically informed, non-Marxist, illiberal institutional analysis, which I undertook in my later work. It also solicited institutional critique, the attempt to apply the tools refined in reading Coleridge to the situation of my own writing and teaching.
22. I didn't get round to doing that in a relatively straightforward way until the mid-eighties when I wrote on critical apostasy, the de Man controversy, the issue of academic celebrity, and on the uses of Romanticism at the end of history. But the funny thing was that even early on, I felt that everything I wrote about Coleridge was an allegory of criticism at the present time: the aftermath of collegiate activism, the insistence of market considerations. It was, I concede, an especially opaque, even private

allegory, at best the expression of what might be called a socio-political preconsciousness. But, then, I was and am no historian, no sociologist, no economist. Because I had (and wanted) no explanatory apparatus to deploy, the readings had to come first. I couldn't assume as the *Marxisant* historicist assumes that I knew what agenda the text was serving. That was not a political or philosophical bias, but a disciplinary burden. As a critic trained in Romantic poetry and prose, held fast in the no man's land between formalism and rhetorical criticism, which "writing" names, I believed then as I believe now that the only capital I have that is not the spare change of others is readings that derive from the application of an opportunistic technique to a set of compelling literary texts — readings that recursively or, if you prefer, allegorically illuminate the site of their making.

23. **SN:** So, to try to transpose this back into the terms that you set out in "Corporate Populism," it sounds as if what the savvy grad student at that time did was to take what was really a matter of use and turn it into what looks like a Bloomian priority without the struggle between the people practicing that technique for the Oedipal mantle. You were there — in on the ground floor. You had something like priority but you were purveying it rather than being seduced by it. Does that seem right?
24. **JC:** Yeah, the sophistic idea was to be the seducer rather than being seduced, although it would be making myself out to be slightly more cynical and a great deal more self-possessed than I was or am to claim that this was a deliberate project or to deny that there was no seduction by Derrida, behind whose chariot I danced.
25. **SN:** I'd like to jump further in your career, because the next book was on Hume, *Practicing Enlightenment*.⁴ It seems to me there were some important continuities between the Coleridge book and the Hume book — the emphasis on writing, on the man of letters — but the new term seems to me "composition." If you say that your earlier use of tropology involved technique rather than system, you get interested in the system of systems in that book, which turns out to be a political economy that involves not only goods but discourse itself. You see Hume getting systematic in a way that Coleridge never managed to be.
26. **JC:** Right, a treatise in action.
27. **SN:** What moved you in that direction?
28. **JC:** (long pause) Well, as I said I began to understand that I had drastically foreshortened the social dimension of the texts that I had studied, that is, the account of how the texts operated in the world, even if it was a world of their own imagining. I did not aspire to find the deep cause because I have no ambition to isolate any deeper cause than the writer writing, nor to prove what effects such writings did in fact (indeed, Hume became my subject because causation could be set aside except as a compulsive figure of the mind) but I was interested in the social effect that a writer might imagine that he or she could have by writing philosophical treatises or essays or poems or a *biographia literaria*. In deconstructing Coleridge, the philosophical critic, I rendered a Coleridge whose text was the allegory of the chiasmus, but, inescapably I posited a writer who could imagine that the felicitous deployment of such a trope entailed a practice of social consequence. Coleridge's philosophical aspirations were disabled by his sophisticated rhetoric (Who would want it otherwise? Who would prefer that Coleridge be Schelling?), but his career as a writer in motley genres and sundry places was enabled by his vacillation, his apostasies, the intractable irritability of his text. But I had no real narrative. And not just me. Among deconstructionists in the late seventies and early eighties, resistance to the illusory comforts of narrative was the badge of critical rigor.
29. I've never had much success at writing history, but I have found it congenial to write prehistory. What I mean by that is that although I haven't the skills to write a thickly described causal account of the

emergence of the social formation called the professional writer, I could effectively imagine the emergence of the professional writer, supported by the institutions of the press, the book trade, and the university as a kind of horizon, a point in the future where something like a true social history begins—where the Victorian period, with its Mayhews, Dickens, and Eliots begins. History would follow. What belongs to the writers that interested me was a prehistory, where one could hope to escape the pressure and ignominy of writing for hire and aspire to a cultural prestige, financial prosperity, intellectual independence that could not be fully achieved because of the lack of the enabling socio-economic infrastructure. The word that Coleridge used for that pre-professional (later para-professional) species was the man of letters.

30. I once prepared a proposal for a big book on the eighteenth-century man of letters that would begin with Hume and end with Coleridge, including Johnson, Gray, et. al. along the way. The proposal turned out to be a map of my ignorance. I couldn't formulate the meta-narrative and couldn't really epitomize the careers of my subjects in micro-narratives. I am delighted to have as a colleague Mark Schoenfield whose ambition is similar but whose prospect for success is far greater. At any rate, the work on Hume emerged as a study of a single enlightenment literary career, a series of readings of philosophical, autobiographical, and epistolary texts, understood as something like the surplus value that the capital of the "stillborn" *Treatise of Human Nature* produced. Along the way I attempted to use Hume's career as a conspectus of various themes, such as the composition of society, the role of women in the formation of the enlightenment man of letters, and the relation of the discourse of political economy to the practice of the literary career. Coleridge suffered from a self-consciousness that could never happily close upon itself or represent its own ground without undermining it. Suffered in two ways: because in the *Biographia* Coleridge fancied that the grounding of self-consciousness as world-fashioning starting point would establish philosophical criticism's authority to vindicate philosophical poetry; and because he registered the failure to complete the philosophical proof as the fault of a disabling consciousness of self, which chronically embarrassed his noblest projects and, not incidentally, conveniently excused his failures. Hume saw self-consciousness as simply a problem, vexing, certainly, but hardly the most important problem and not at all disabling. From the perspective of Hume Coleridge's debilitating self-consciousness looks like the predictable effect of a *commitment* to self-consciousness as some state of being that is qualitatively different from what we ordinarily believe and do.
31. You're right. I put a great deal of pressure on Hume's term "composition," which described a relational writing that presupposes persons who are simultaneously the deliberate supervisors of their emotions and yet are wholly composed by the social system—the network of prevailing beliefs—in which they ineluctably find themselves. Where the narrative came in was in interpreting Hume's science of man as a strategy for accruing social power and in showing how, for Hume, such aggrandizement followed, as if by a necessary association of ideas, from the practice dictated by the thesis. Such power talk was coin of the realm at the time. And no doubt I indulged in the dark pleasures of a hermeneutics of suspicion. But I was fortunate to have the deliciously bizarre account by Rousseau of his dealings with Hume, a narrative whose challenge to Hume's intentions made my suspicions look imaginatively impoverished by comparison. What is wonderful about that mad text is that Rousseau did not attack Hume for being wrong as Coleridge would later do but for being right—so right that he had become a philosophical tyrant who threatened to eclipse all other lights and enslave other thinkers. And, however much he disputed the circumstantial details, Hume had to agree with the central charge. It is one of those rare moments where strong writers can successfully impersonate epochs and hyperbolically enact a historical crisis. Farcically, some would say, because history is always somewhere else. Or, tragically, as Adorno would say, because the history that they think they are enacting is forever the dialectic of enlightenment. For me Adorno is irresistible, and, thinking back, I suppose what beguiled me was not the chance to demonstrate the passage from classic to romantic, but the resemblance of the encounter to the great exemplum from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: Hume as an Odysseus binding himself to the mast in order safely to listen to Rousseau's siren song—except there is no safety, for though the song

evaporates, the ropes cut deep.

32. **SN:** It seems that one of the consequences of the thinking through Hume was to also take the pathos out of contradiction, the kind of bouncing around that Coleridge does in an attempt to find the thing in the system that makes it all fall apart. From your understanding of Hume's perspective, failure looks merely like a possibility that Hume has already contemplated and worked through as just a thing that happens in system. Meta-critically, this also seems to be part of your suspicion of a certain mode of ideological demystification in contemporary criticism that thinks if it finds a contradiction, then aha! the revolution's coming.
33. **JC:** The great phrase that was a touchstone for me comes from Deleuze and Guattari, "No one was ever killed by a contradiction." And if there was one man who understood that, it was David Hume. . . . Even the great contradiction of Rousseau did not kill him. But it is also true that it did not make him stronger.

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Notes

¹ *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 438-465.

² *Coleridge's Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981).

³ "The Sublime and the Romance of the Other," *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 8 (1978), 10-23.

⁴ *Practicing Enlightenment: Hume and the Formation of a Literary Career* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1987).

Finding Romantic Commonplaces: An Interview With Jerome Christensen

Site Two: Salisbury Plain, Sympathy, and Historicism

Steve Newman, Temple University

Stonehenge

(permission of Emily Mace)

Stonehenge

1. **Steve Newman:** Now, I'd like to turn to your position now on historicism and I'd like to come back to the seminar room from a different angle. In the seminars I sat in on and the ones I've heard of, where you tend to start is *Salisbury Plain*. The term I'm thinking of is "sympathy." In the introduction to your new book, *Romanticism at the End of History*, you assert, "These essays endeavor to fend off sympathy, the historicist's technology for channeling the past. Being anti-historicist does not entail a denial of history but a rejection of the inevitability of history."⁵ I was hoping you could clarify what you mean by sympathy — this act that historicist criticism falls into — by thinking about your reading of *Adventures of Salisbury Plain*, particularly that stanza where the cottagers say, "He is the Man."⁶ How do those terms link up for you?
2. **Jerome Christensen:** One way of reading the revisions that Wordsworth made in *Salisbury Plain* is to track the transference of speech from one interlocutor to the other, expressions and stories the vagrant woman says in *Salisbury Plain* that get picked up (appropriated? echoed?) by the "sailor" in *Adventures of Salisbury Plain*. The history that the vagrant recounts is a story of the state's technology of dispossession: dispossession of her home, her husband, and her "perfect mind." The state is capable of impersonating history because its technology efficiently produces effects that catastrophically bring great things into conjunction with the small. Yet if the vagrant has been dispossessed of much that makes being benign, she seems to have acquired a force comparable in kind to that of the state's. At least we credit her historicist account because the narrative that she tells compels the sailor sympathetically to suffer a dispossession similar to her own. Context — the events that, she attests, made her what she is — registers as narrative and narrative acts as compulsion. We know her narrative is true not because it persuasively depicts causal links, but because it forcefully prescribes sympathy. It is fair to call the narrative a technology because it is frequently described as "artless"; that is, it seems to work without the application of a designing mind. Causation without intention. Compulsion to no end. In the revisions of the poem, it is the mission of Wordsworth to imagine the appropriation of that impersonal technology by the sailor as a deliberative art, something for which *he* can be responsible. In sympathy and out of sympathy he attempts to do justice to history by connecting it to his life, bringing it home. He impersonates the prescriptive force of history, by enacting a murder, committing an authorial crime. But as the "ecce homo" moment of christological exemplarity argues, that attempt to author history is itself prescribed. The multitude of conflicting determinations which sympathy falsifies into compelling affect can only finally cohere in a generic image, a captioned picture that seals off further eventfulness, an effect that proves cause by freezing speech.
3. **SN:** So if we trace the analogy out from what you're saying in your recent collection of essays, it's your sense that historicist criticism tends to reproduce its own prescriptions by entering into a

sympathetic engagement with the past. . .

4. **JC:** Yes. To simplify it, historicist criticism understands the speech of historical actors as prescribed: "What else could Coleridge say? What else could Wordsworth say? They're middle class. They live in the country. They're trying to earn money. What else could they say?" The other side of that is that one then is compelled to repudiate that speech as interested displacement or neurotic denial. And my response is that, no, as an ethical matter, as a Wordsworthian matter, to accept such speech as prescribed is a choice that one makes in order to construct a certain kind of preferred narrative that is a commentary on a picture that one holds dear, more dear perhaps because of one's own sense of dispossession by history.
5. **SN:** But this is not a problem that you think can be by solved, for example, by reflexivity, the kind of Romantic New Historicism that says, "Yes, of course, I know I'm determined, let me tell you how determined I am." All the reflexivity in the world isn't going to get you out of the ethical moment that requires you to listen to what other speech might sound like.
6. **JC:** I think that's right. I don't find that Romantic irony then or now is a particularly interesting way of dealing with prescription and failed transcendence because in fact it's just reproducing the terms of the argument and is just insisting once again, in the name of an ersatz critical science, that efforts at transcendence will fail. When in fact transcendence is not the real Romantic issue at all. Freedom from compulsion is: the capacity to choose to be obligated.
7. And I suppose that's part of the reason why I get caught up in individuals rather than spacious texts, large historical periods. It's difficult for me not to think in terms of persons speaking and of the places that their speech both presupposes and brings into being.
8. **SN:** Given your objections to historicist criticism, I wonder what you think of James Chandler's new book, *England in 1819*.⁷ It talks about anachronism and it speaks of the blind spots in historicist criticism. And it does acknowledge that you and other people have talked about those issues. But it handles those issues in very different ways. For example, the status for anachronism for Chandler is different; for him, it doesn't pose the kind of threat you see it posing to the naturalized change put forth by liberalism. What's your general reaction to it?
9. **JC:** I applaud it. A history of historicism, it is the long awaited epitaph. Chandler accurately redresses a founding omission by observing that the actual object of *The Romantic Ideology's* critique was *Natural Supernaturalism* and not the Romantic poets. It's a major testament to Abrams that he was fit to serve as the covering cherub for Romanticism. It's good to see Chandler set the record straight.
10. **SN:** It's already a long book, so criticizing what's not in it feels specious. But one thing that's not in it is deconstruction. De Man, for example, is barely mentioned. That's maybe because Wordsworth doesn't figure heavily into it. Still, the issues associated with deconstructive Romanticist criticism, which, like it or not, played an important historical role, are not touched on much. For example, the question of the signifier comes in only at the end, when he talks about how Shelley might imagine a future in "Ode on the West Wind." My intuition is that this elision is partly because the favorite figure in that book is Walter Scott, and I think that Chandler understands what he's doing is a "Case Study" and that my understanding of casuistry relies on Scott's understanding of what counts as a case study, what counts as a representative anecdote. These are, of course, Kenneth Burke's terms, and in response, I would say that by emphasizing "scene," Chandler tones down "act" — understood as the power or charm of words that was so gripping to so many writers at the time and is recapitulated in the post-structuralist criticism of the seventies and eighties.

11. **JC:** It's an interesting way to put it. Because another way of talking about the dark night of historicism is that what you're seeing is a natural evolution of any kind of movement. And the New Historicism was a powerful one. What we're getting now is an officializing strategy. What Chandler's book represents is an attempt to consolidate a field by supplying its theory in a way that will normalize its principles and operations. Nowhere is that clearer than in the extraordinary effort Chandler takes to theorize the case which, in some sense, in the sense that history provides, has been exactly what has gone without saying. As he frequently mentions, there is almost nothing written about cases, in part because within Anglo-American discourse, which has been governed by a jurisprudential vocabulary, "case" is practically synonymous with topos. The theorizing of case involves the officializing of a discourse that has been common to all. In that respect Chandler follows his master, Walter Scott, who had no peer in his ability to take language that was either waning or customary and deploy it for administrative use. For Scott, as for Chandler, the law is the official strategy for all officializing strategies: fiction's false teeth.

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Notes

⁵ *Romanticism at the End of History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000).

⁶ See "Ecce Homo: Biographical Acknowledgment, the End of the French Revolution, and the Romantic Reinvention of English Verse," *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism*, ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1991), rpt. as chapter in *Romanticism at the End of History*.

⁷ *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998.)

Finding Romantic Commonplaces: An Interview with Jerome Christensen

Site Three: Use, Pedagogy, and Addiction

Steve Newman, Temple University

Microsoft's Campus

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Resource mapping Section, Washington Department of Natural Resources.
Microsoft Campus

1. **Steve Newman:** I'd like to move on to a different set of questions about pedagogy. It has to do with an essay from your new collection, which hasn't been published elsewhere, "Using: Romantic Ethics and Digital Media in the Ruins of the University." In that essay, you describe your aims in founding The Center for Digital Media Research and Development at Hopkins which were to help to initiate Hopkins undergraduates into a craft that would allow them to foster their own agency in a labor market increasingly dominated by a corporate culture exemplified by Microsoft and Nike. And to show how this is in fact a Romantic praxis, you seize on the stigmatization of these students as "computer addicts," taking that as a sign that they are the post-Fordist heirs of Thomas de Quincey and his "crypto-liberal line of descent." De Quincey, you argue, breaks the narrative of addiction that would rob him of his agency, a narrative that would match his present and future with an irremediable past. He does that by an act of rhetoric: He postulates that the moment when pleasurable use turns into abuse can't be specified. In this act of performative will, he alters the contract between author and reader. Instead of promising to match up effects with causes, he promises the reader the pleasure that comes with an act of rhetorical invention that leaves one open to the possibility of accident and capable of weathering change.
2. You then say that this same conspiracy governs digital media research, whereby these students' "unreasoning affinity for computers" is transformed into a shared practice that teaches students to use their addictions to their benefit. Does that sound like an adequate summary?
3. **Jerome Christensen:** That's a good account.
4. **SN:** The first question I had is about the category of production in your argument. The first thing that strikes me about it is that it's the most optimistic presentation you've made about it. For example, in *Practicing Enlightenment*, you cite Baudrillard's argument that by "insisting on man as a producer, Marx remains entrapped within that mirror of production that permits that infinite reflection on itself that is the capitalist mode of reproduction." Or, in "The Romantic Movement at the End of History," what makes the insurrectionaries Romantic is that, from the standpoint of a culture looking to cure them, they do no work. So even if we read the insurrectionaries as Romantic addicts, they certainly weren't doing work that the Microsoft of their day might have found useful. So it's my sense that "use" and "production" have acquired a certain status in this essay that they haven't elsewhere in your work. Or perhaps this is a more populist instantiation of the aristocratic agency you accord to Byron in his co-optation of "Byronism" in *Lord Byron's Strength*?⁸
5. **JC:** I tried to avoid the term "production." Not because anyone hates production, not because it makes your hands dirty. It's simply because as a discrete category, referring to a system or a situation,

production has completed its work. Any argument that is going to have any application to the way we live now will have to enfold production into consumption.

6. **SN:** "Using" cuts both ways, toward production and consumption.
7. **JC:** Right. Addiction, as De Quincey represents it, is compulsive consumption. Every scholar of De Quincey who knows anything about opium says that, judging from his account, you'd never believe he had ever actually taken opium. Opium is a figure for poetry. And for De Quincey, opium eating is a poesis. De Quincey de-moralizes the conception of poetry he's inherited from Wordsworth. Just as De Quincey's representation of the opium eater abuses Coleridge's definition of the poet as someone who puts the whole man into activity, so De Quincey abuses poetry by rendering opium eating as though it has a poetics every bit as complicated and gratifying as that involved in the making of poems.
8. That seems true to life. At least true to the life that digital poets lead now. If we were to have a long running camcorder to record a fourteen-year-old suburbanite, we would find that this person is moving fairly quickly from something like sheer consumption of images to the making of images, say, on a Website a digital "composite art." The downloading of MP3s as a step in the assembly of a personal CD which composes tunes into a personal musical program.
9. The digital user employs the same tool for both consumption and for making. Not only don't you need to be a rocket scientist, you don't need to be a computer scientist. Most of the materials used to achieve preferred outcomes are found and re-processed. Using is a secondary imagination. If we think of ourselves as constantly jeopardized rightsholders, that re-manipulation is plagiarism, subject to the law. But considered as users what we're actually seeing is a form of collaboration, not a naming but a making, which acquires the material from upriver. Again, thinking of the current MP3 debates, those who "plagiarize" in this manner have no conception, or have a *merely* legal conception, of what plagiarism might possibly be, just as they start out with no concrete idea of the person who has created the song or even posted it. One of the ways in which things happen is that you electronically engage those people on the other end or people like those people, narrowing the degrees of separation, and in the process discursively develop an ethic of use.
10. **SN:** How precisely do you mean poesis?
11. **JC:** Just precisely enough to seduce people into the appreciation of the collaborative making of interactive multimedia programs as artful labor freshened by regular impulses of mild surprise.
12. **SN:** I'd like to take our discussion back toward pedagogy. To return to "Rhetoric and Corporate Populism"—we should mention that that essay will not be appearing in the forthcoming collection. . .
13. **JC:** Right. On the advice of my lawyers.
14. **SN:** On the advice of your lawyers. In that essay, you put forth de Man as a paradoxical model insofar as his teaching seems to have avoided both what you call "seduction" and "recruitment" and thus avoided a certain kind of humanist mimeticism in which the student learns to reproduce the teacher's world-view.
15. **JC:** Right.
16. **SN:** But it's not the case that you adopt De Man's teaching method as your own, at least insofar as De Man in "Resistance to Theory" states: "Teaching is not primarily an intersubjective relationship between people but a cognitive process in which self and other are only tangentially involved." That can't be your method as you have described it, since the "breathing together" you find so attractive in

the Romantic model requires intersubjectivity. Does that seem like a fair point?

17. **JC:** Sure. I stretched the point with De Man for polemical purposes in order to argue that a good deal of the outrage over the revelations about De Man's past was fueled by a deep mistrust of his effectiveness in turning out students who did De Manian criticism. De Man would and did give an alternative account, one that, I think, mystified what actually occurs in the seminar room and, by virtue of that mystification, enacted the mimeticism against which he inveighed. The trouble for me is with the word "cognitive," which produces the strange equation of an "intersubjective relationship between people" with a duet between "self and other." I can only understand the avoidance of the term "rhetorical" as a symptom of the De Manian reduction of rhetoric to an understanding of the operation of tropes, so that turning out analyses of poems and turning out students could look like the same sort of inexorable operation. For better or worse, my emphasis on the commonplace aims to broaden the understanding of rhetoric to include the siting of tropes, a process in which a teacher and a student—not self and other—are conspiratorially involved.
18. **SN:** So, if that's the case, how do you deal with the transference relationship that might attend that "breathing together"? I know that this is a difficult question to be asked by a student of yours, but how do you respond to the agons of the classroom in which the students often compete against each other for the regard of the teacher and seem to identify with his or her desire? And how do you understand your own authority and desire as a teacher? And I think here of a line in a recent book that describes your work as "inimitable." And I'm assuming that's that the way you'd like it to be.
19. **JC:** I suppose "inimitable" is a fair description of the kind of the associative and improvisational style of teaching and writing that I tend to do. I come from a tradition in which *The Visionary Company* and *The Anxiety of Influence* are simply true, in which the potency of the poets is so deeply intimidating that it does encourage what Plato would stigmatize as bad mimeticism in which one attempts to perform the inimitability of the poetry itself as an attempt to communicate its informing power. Certainly a lot of my teaching is quasi-theatrical and non-scripted and improvisational. I work in a seminar but I'm never sure the seminar works.
20. **SN:** That's precisely the question I had. I hope this doesn't embarrass you, but what got me hooked on Romanticism initially was your reading of the Salisbury Plain poems in which somehow what was happening was Coleridge was Little Ricky Ricardo [SN and JC start laughing], pining at the breast. . . . That was not a type of teaching I had encountered before.
21. **JC:** Perhaps because it is not teaching at all.
22. **SN (laughing):** Well, I'm still trying to be a Romanticist, so whatever it was, it seems to have been effective, at least from my perspective. But the question I had along these lines stems from a line in "Using," in which you write that students now have an "unreasoning affinity" for computers that they used to have for poetry. I read that with a certain pathos—I mean the pathos was mine, not yours. I thought, "But I'm still trying to teach Romanticism, not digital media." So I wonder if your artisanal or workshop model, which does mitigate the scenes of recognition and cure, the normalizing narratives we have of the transference, would work in a Romanticism seminar. Or if you had thought of doing it. Or if I had thought of doing it. I have tried to experiment pedagogically in the Writing Center and in other contexts, but I also have to admit that most of the teaching I've done involves student presentations, etc. and other not-exactly-radical techniques. And I also try to mirror back to students what they are saying in my comments, trying to use their vocabulary to whatever degree I can, which is something you do extraordinarily well. But still, although I find "Using" generally optimistic, I'm not sure how optimistic it is for seminars, particularly Romantic seminars.

23. **JC:** Well, students don't spend enough time in seminars. They spend the right amount of time on the course, but not in seminar. Just say, don't read the book before you come to class, which is the opposite of what we always say, "Make sure you read the book before you come to class."
24. **SN:** "Don't waste my time."
25. **JC:** Yeah, "Don't waste my time because we only have a certain amount of time in class." That's one of the things that happens in the Digital Media lab or in a film production course. Those people spend hours and hours and hours together. Then they go away and come back with ideas, stupid ideas and good ideas. And at the end of the day, no one knows whose idea it was. And no one catches on or rather, everyone catches on. So there's not such an onus about making a mistake.
26. **SN:** The trick is to produce a cathexis to the questions you ask and not to yourself. That's the sense in which I want to be charismatic. It's not as if I have all these students banging down my door dying to get into my courses. That hasn't happened yet. But I catch myself spinning out that fantasy. When you say it's tricky, that's how I think it's tricky.
27. **JC:** Well, charisma *is* a tricky thing and its role is not easy to dismiss, since the occupation of university professor is one of the hallmarks of the routinization of charisma. We're all offered the opportunity for our star turns. Part of what I mean by the conspiracy model is a democratization of the undergraduate and graduate seminar experience, which I think can be achieved by people working together in a common place toward a common end. What makes teaching today different from the sixties and seventies, the heyday of high theory and second wave feminism, is that just as the master narratives have expired, so have the master movements that nerved professors to posture as exponents of an adversary politics and culture. Who leads the class now? And to what end? Classroom conspiracies concoct collective projects that acknowledge no master teacher and adhere to no master narrative. They cohere in the coded occultation of their goals from the authorities—both self and other—and prosper (if they do) as the allegorical elaboration of their equivocal institutional situation.

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Notes

⁸ *Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993).

Finding Romantic Commonplaces: An Interview with Jerome Christensen

Site Four: Romantic Populism and Insurgent Civil Society

Steve Newman, Temple University

Mural picture

The Getty Museum

[left] A Mural from South Central Los Angeles: 'Riot is the language of the unheard.'

[right] Approaching the Getty Museum (courtesy of Elizabeth N. Leatherbury)

1. **Steve Newman:** We didn't directly talk about the picture of the Microsoft campus that's the icon for the previous site—its relevance to the question of "using" will, I hope, be evident to the reader. But Microsoft might be thought of as the silent partner of this concluding site as well. What I had initially planned to do was to juxtapose pictures from the on-line tour of the Getty Museum with those from the Los Angeles riot/uprising, an admittedly crude diptych designed to picture two possible directions for the Romantic classroom. Not that we would be starting riots but rather that we would be studying them more, in light of the recent move toward cultural studies. How, I wanted to ask, should we deal with the split that many see between elite and popular culture?
2. But I was quickly reminded of the fact this question of cultural value is not independent of issues having to do with intellectual property. The Getty wanted to limit the length of my hyperlink to a few months, which, of course, negates the use of a hyperlink; and *The L. A. Times* wanted to charge me an exorbitant fee to rent its pictures of the Riot (or, as some refer to it, Uprising) for 90 days and informed me that they simply do not allow hyperlinks. After consulting with the editors of *Romantic Circles*, it became clear that we could either use the images anyway and expose the site to litigation that, even if we won (as the case law would seem to indicate), would prove awfully expensive and perhaps open the site to further suits or we could try to find a way around it. So we found a way around it: A cousin of mine in L. A. was kind enough to take some photos of the Getty and Professor Roger Keil graciously agreed to allow me to use his picture of the mural from his book, *Los Angeles*.
3. I mention this because I know that you have run into similar difficulties in your own work in digital media/CD-ROMs as you've attempted to depart from the Microsoft model of motivating workers by fear instead of co-operation — difficulties that couldn't be so easily resolved.
4. **Jerome Christensen:** Yes, trying to do *Raisin in the Sun*, the second CD in our projected series of interactive editions of modern dramas. When considering possibilities for a major project that would give coherence and continuity to the Digital Media Center, my partner and I decided to follow the initiative of Michael Kohler, a grad student at the time, who suggested we undertake a series of digital editions of modern dramatic works. There were two potent reasons for undertaking that project. First, it was clear that multi-media technology would not be merely supplementary or illustrative, as it would have been had we sought to do a digital edition of *The Prelude* or *Ulysses*, but it would solve a long-standing pedagogical problem: the separation of the text from performance. The second reason was our

anecdotally informed conviction that modern drama is not being taught as much in secondary or even college classrooms as it used to be. It's no longer the lively art.

5. We thought that the pedagogical virtues and the techie sexiness of CD-ROM would enhance the accessibility of texts that could seem abstract and remote. We tried to use as many texts as possible from the public domain and had great success in assembling a CD-ROM edition of Ibsen's *Doll House* with the support of Annenberg/CPB, which now distributes the title.
6. The edition uses a theatrical interface to integrate video annotation and text, to access archival material and critical commentary available nowhere else. The extended classroom project involved faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates, scientists and humanists. None of us was a specialist in modern drama. In planning the edition we had to teach the play to each other and, in the process, learn how to use it so that we could imagine diverse users of our finished edition. It was the most satisfying educational experience of my career, and I'm very proud of what we accomplished.

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7. We next wanted to do Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun*, both for its cultural importance and its manifest excellence as a drama. The rights to the play, to the biographical materials, and to one of the two major cinematic adaptations are owned by an heir. At the outset of the project our agent was assured by her agent that the project would somehow work out but that the rightsholder wanted to see more of the project before she signed off. But a year later, when we were ready to assemble all the collected materials, she decided, as she had in previous cases, not to approve the project, that our vision was not her idea—the one she was deluded into thinking she had in her head simply because she happened to own the intellectual rights. End of story. We had been savvy enough to realize we needed to work with dead authors, we had failed to realize that we also needed to work with dead heirs. I can't tell you how discouraging it was to be utterly blocked from use of a play that should be part of the legacy of every American by some person who had no stake in the property except her own vanity and greed.
8. When you enter the area in which demand really counts, you have to expect to run up against people, profit despots, who are going to be able to pre-empt your access, whether or not they actually intend to develop the resources for use. Let me underline that point: the reason that there is no multimedia edition of modern dramatic works and that there may never be is because given the expense of permissions to use materials that the rightsholders, such as Columbia Pictures, have no intention of exploiting, for there is no way to make a profit on such a product. We could hope to succeed because we were working with student labor in a non-profit, educational cocoon, cutting the cost of the project by about 60 to 75%.
9. But for the very reasons that we could hope to succeed in the short run, we were likely to fail in the long run because we could never be sufficiently capitalized in order to overcome a setback such as that we experienced with *Raisin*. Yes, I would do things differently if I had them to do over again. But the conditions of production in a corporate capitalist culture insured that one instance of misjudgment would make it impossible to apply what one had learned to a new effort. We lost no profit because none was in the offing. But I do think that the loss to students and to the cause of modern drama is worth noting, even if there is no spreadsheet on which it could be indicated.
10. **SN:** I have two more questions. The first involves the juxtaposition of the pictures for this site. In the Getty's hypertour, the picture I wanted to use, with the city far off in the distance, has the caption: "The Getty center is surrounded but yet slightly removed from the City, evoking both urbanity and peaceful contemplation. It's an experience you'll want to repeat time and time again." The second is from Roger

Keil's recent book on Los Angeles,⁹ which is where the mural I've chosen comes from.

11. Keil introduces a term that appeals to me — "insurgent civil society." There, he's talking about activists from a wide variety of communities who have gathered together to protest, for example, the closing of the GM plant at Van Nuys, fighting against environmental racism, etc. It seems to me that one of the things about "The Romantic Movement at the End of History" is that it imagines a space out of which a Romantic politics might emerge. The fact that it's Romantic means that you can't tell, exactly, what that politics is, but it does have the effect of producing communities that resist easy administration. What I'm curious is about where the Romantic classroom stands in relation to these spaces. On one hand, you could imagine the spectacular space of the Getty Center as one model, dedicated to the preservation of high cultural artifacts and more than "slightly removed" from the city, and on the other the noisy praxis of "insurgent civil society." But this easy binary is complicated by, among other things, the implications of "Using." That is, it's not that the politics of the street that you allude to in "The Romantic Movement" has vanished but the computer seems to be an interstitial space between, on one hand, a heavily capitalized world like that of the Getty and the computer industry and, on the other, something more demotic and fluid. Is that one of the things that attracts you about the computer?
12. **JC:** I am a student of M. H. Abrams, and I do think that, in an alternative history, *The Mirror, the Lamp, and the Computer* would have been a perfect title for that book. And that insofar as I can imagine adding anything to his legacy is to add a footnote, that the computer is a metaphor for a different way of understanding what poems can do rather than what poems are. And that, in fact, as I've long said, if Hartley had been able to imagine the computer, we could have just skipped the nineteenth century. Having said that, it just seems like an easy thing to say. It's non-falsifiable. I'm not quite sure whether the computer is simply a metaphor. That's why I use the word "digital" rather than "computer." I want to focus on the medium rather than fetishizing the tool and those who hold the licenses that inhibit use.
13. I tend to think I'm more humble in my teaching than I was, and what I can expect to teach. That's a real change, and I think it's a good change. In part, it's based on a certainty that anyone who is teaching now will inevitably learn more from the students than they will learn from them. And that if we don't, we're lost. Because what we have to struggle for is a *modus vivendi* and *docendi* that emerges out of a corporate experience that is not subject to those who cook the books at Price Waterhouse. The university is a place where that struggle can work. It doesn't require new forms of social organization in order to get that done, just intelligent exploitation of the one we have.
14. **SN:** When you say that we don't need new forms of social organization, I come back to Keil's term "insurgent civil society" as a way to think then about the relationship between the university and the broader public. What we can do about that? For example, when I was at Hopkins, I was involved, though by no means a central player, in the Living Wage Campaign,¹⁰ which pitted very different visions of the university against each other. I mention this because I'm wondering what your response is to the split we often feel between the politics we want to profess and our job descriptions as professors of literature. Should the university be the site for producing an "insurgent civil society," and, if so, what should our role be in that production?
15. **JC:** For me that would involve a strategic exploitation of the corporate status of the university, its exemptions and its powers. Johns Hopkins is incorporated in the state of Maryland, Vanderbilt chartered in Tennessee. As Hopkins is the biggest employer in Baltimore, so Vanderbilt is the largest employer in Nashville. We know that the corporatization of American life is the dominant social movement of the twentieth century. We know that the university has been a beneficiary and participant in that process. We also know, thanks to the work of scholars like William G. Roy, that there was nothing inevitable about the emergence to predominance of the large, privately owned corporation,

which was a matter of particular political decisions taken at particular times. It should follow that there is nothing inexorable about the future, which may involve insurgency or may involve accommodation. My view is simply that we need to understand that the notion of the university as an adversary culture, responsible for sponsoring social change from somewhere outside is both outmoded and counter-productive. In my experience few faculty, even politically committed faculty, demonstrate interest in how the university works, which leaves them incapacitated when, occasionally, they have the opportunity to change how it might work.

16. Thinking the ruin of the university should entail clarification of its actual corporate status, including the responsibilities the non-profit university acquires along with its immunities. Such clarification, spread among faculty, students, and staff would certainly produce universities harder to administer and, therefore, better, more justly administered. It is an open question whether that would entail a wholesale redescription of professionalism as an occupational norm. Right now, professionalism as a standard at a place like Hopkins works as a pretext to cling to a narrow, ever more jeopardized disciplinary autonomy while conceding governance to administrators whose values are more closely shaped by their corporate overseers on the Board of Trustees than by the faculty from whose ranks they have been sublimely elevated. . . . Campaigns for a "living wage" for university employees seem promising in part because it both exploits and critiques the professionalist mindset. Whether clarification would lead to any substantive result, such as the community that Keil endorses, I don't know. But if it didn't we'd have nobody to blame but ourselves.
17. **SN:** One of the ways in which universities are not like corporations is that they can't move around, so they're great targets for a campaign like this. And they also produce a certain kind of humanistic rhetoric that other corporations do not. I think here of the ability of those involved in the Living Wage Campaign, including Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), to use Hopkins's immobility and rhetoric against the administration's dubious claims. The administration claimed that they couldn't afford the minuscule amounts necessary to pay their workers a living wage, even though they had just completed a campaign that had raised over \$1 billion for the endowment and had netted \$250 million off their stocks in that year alone; that they couldn't afford to provide anything like reasonable health benefits, even though they administered what is perhaps the best hospital in the world; and, when they were sufficiently agitated, that they simply weren't going to cede managerial power to "outsiders," even though those "outsiders," as BUILD and its allies ceaselessly pointed out were the faculty, staff, and students at Hopkins, along with the community in which Hopkins supposedly dwelled.
18. Another question here has to do with the relation between teaching and activism. The paradox that many of us have recognized is that the kind of teaching that seems to us emancipatory requires that we can't control its outcomes — crudley put, the gap between a more open pedagogical stance and politics in its more restricted but more directly effective sense.
19. **JC:** Right. But it does seem to me that insofar as it's an abstract proposition and insofar as you place value on freedom and opportunity and capacity and equality is only important insofar as possibilities for self-development, which include the material and the social—
20. **SN:** "Life chances"
21. **JC:** —right, life chances. Then it seems you me you have to accept contingency as part of the deal. There's no way for me to control the consequences.
22. **SN:** Last question. In a footnote to the Romantic movement you "hazard the anachronistic claim in the spirit of Raymond Williams that in the long view, cultural populism is romanticism." I'd appreciate it if

you'd flesh out this claim by addressing the role of film in your work, which we haven't talked about much, since I don't really have the expertise to ask you much about it. What does film have to do with cultural populism? It seems to me that the heavily capitalized structure of film production and distribution would seem to make it a difficult medium for the kind of motility you ascribe to demotic. Is it demotic in its consumption? Or could it be in the small laboratories you've worked with?.

23. **JC:** Was that comment supposed to be bleak or optimistic?
24. **SN:** Hopeful, I think. Because then the kind of stereotypes and secret signs you see circulating among the working class in the early nineteenth century has passed into punk and other, more contemporary movements.
25. **JC:** Oh! "Cultural populism"! For a minute there I thought you had said "corporate populism." My God, that would've been a bleak thing for me to have written. . . . I don't know if I meant "Romantic" in the academic sense. To speak of "cultural populism" as "Romanticism" is to speak of it as a life form rather than a discipline and therefore just trying to stay ahead of the grim historical reaper by reformulating or reorganizing what one values in Romantic poetry in other media and other guises. There's no way to think about Romanticism without thinking about poems. But there's no way of thinking about poems without engaging in the activity of making poems. Not necessary lines across the page but poems can become HTML or can be, obviously, music or architecture or modes of organizing communities. And it is one of the fundamental mystifications of rhetorical criticism that there is no way to dissipate affect. It is always there for one to use. And all one has to find is the appropriate tools in order to apply it for use.
26. **SN:** So film in this case would be one of the media. . .
27. **JC:** Yes. The question of film is the question of whether or not corporate control will extend so far as to make individual creativity impossible. That's always happening. That's always happening. But for an industry that's always been looking for a technological fix has gotten itself into a situation where their technological fix also looks like a potential undoing of corporate hegemony or a relaxation of it. In the near future there will be no film on film. Once film is eliminated for digital projection the newest innovation will be adopted without regard to cost and will open up opportunities for independent film makers. Not for all at once and maybe not for all ever. But for ever more filmmakers about to be, and in ways we can't predict. An indie film like *American Movie* — well-financed independent film in the vernacular documentary style about a woefully financed demotic filmmaker using whatever money, people, and tools come to hand — remarks on the potency of class and the rarity of "life chances" while effectively prospecting forms and tools by which socio-economic "facts" can be deprived of their fatality.
28. **SN:** You've focused in your response on independent filmmakers. The next step in what I was thinking that flows from "Film is cultural populism is romanticism" is that in what you call the loss of the common world is that film might give one a language to speak to anyone you meet on the street, despite the fact that it may be distributed in a certain way.
29. **JC:** That's true.
30. **SN:** Even if we didn't have the independent film industry, there would be no way to predict, for example, the *Star Wars* phenomenon. It seems from one standpoint to be a degraded sort of community, but the people who get together to talk about *Star Wars* have their own secret language. Does that world of fandom mark the limit of what you call "cultural populism"?

31. **JC:** I couldn't answer without seeing the Web page. But I can offer a kind of limit. What I mean by "cultural populism" would involve an experiment I'd love to try if I were mayor of Baltimore, where the police have intermittently sponsored markets in which people were invited to trade guns for money. I'd dish the money for guns business and invite folks, young and old, to bring in their guns or syringes in exchange for digital camcorders. I'd say to them: "Go, look for something that you cannot find. Frame it. Shoot it. And bring it back alive."
32. **SN:** I guess we should conclude our discussion by saying that you will not, for better or worse, become the mayor of Baltimore any time soon, now that you've relocated to Vanderbilt. But perhaps Nashville could use some bold new leadership. Thanks.
33. **JC:** My pleasure.

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Notes

⁹ Roger Keil, *Los Angeles: Globalization, Urbanization, and Social Struggles* (New York: J. Wiley, 1998).

¹⁰ For information on the Living Wage movement nationwide, see *The Economic Policy Institute's website*, at www.epinet.org, and the New Party's website: <http://www.newparty.org/livwag/>.

For accounts of the struggle to extend the Living Wage to Hopkins from the point of view of the Student-Labor Action Coalition and its allies, see: slac.members.easyspace.com. For the administration's official response — though those on the other side do not agree to the administration's claims that it has instituted a Living Wage see <http://www.jhu.edu/~gazette/1999/mar0899/08letter.html> and <http://www.jhu.edu/~gazette/2000/mar2000/20slac.html>. For a recent editorial in Baltimore's City Paper, see <http://www.citypaper.com/2000-10-04/nose.html>. For Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), a member of the Industrial Areas Foundation that was instrumental in establishing the nation's first Living Wage ordinance, among other accomplishments, see their website: <http://www.buildiaf.org/>.